



ELISHA



**VON RIBBENTROP  
IS STILL DANGEROUS**

*By the same Author :*

**IN THE STEPS OF LAWRENCE  
OF ARABIA**





Ributov

VON  
**RIBBENTROP**  
is Still  
**Dangerous**

*By*  
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## CHAPTER I

### EARLY CAREER

BY the irony of fate, it has been given to Joachim von Ribbentrop, a man of no great mental calibre, to guide the destinies of the German nation into courses which have shattered the peace of the world and thrown Europe into chaos. It may well be asked how it is that so small a man has been cast for so big a part.

The explanation is not to be found in any especial cleverness or brilliance in intellect, and there is nothing Machiavellian about him beyond his deceitfulness, nothing Bismarckian save treachery and faithlessness; as those who have had dealings with him can testify. Lord Londonderry, who strove through him for a better understanding with Germany to the advantage of Great Britain, unhesitatingly described him as second-rate and, as an ambassador, a man of straw. Sir Nevile Henderson, who had many official contacts with him, writes of him as mistaking rudeness for strength, and tells us that even his own colleague, Goering, accused him of being a criminal fool.<sup>1</sup>

Because Hitler, except for a brief visit to Rome, had never been outside Germany and Austria, Ribbentrop, the traveller and linguist, has exercised a sway in the external affairs of the Reich quite disproportionate to his talents. The Führer, abysmally ignorant of everything outside his own country; speaking no language but his own, turned to Ribbentrop to interpret to him the feelings of the people of other nations and the reactions of their rulers to each new orientation of his peculiar ideology.

It was, of course, Hitler who made the purges and the blood-baths, instituted the concentration camps, persecuted the Jews and murdered friend and foe alike. It was he who broke an endless chain of promises, all solemnly reiterated; who overthrew Austria, liquidated Czechoslovakia and entered into an undeclared war on Poland. But it was on the advice of Ribbentrop that, time after time, he brought Europe to the brink of war, and it was by the deal he made with the Soviets

<sup>1</sup> *Fallen of a Mission*, by Sir Nevile Henderson.

in August 1939 and the hopes he then raised in Hitler, that Germany was brought into open conflict with Britain and France and the Bolsheviks broke bounds.

A glance at the time-table of events emphasizes the evil influence Ribbentrop has exercised in Europe since his appointment as Reichsminister for Foreign Affairs in February 1938. Five weeks later, on March 12th, Austria was annexed. Only six more months passed before the Sudeten crisis reached its peak and the occupation of the Sudetenland quickly followed. Another six months elapsed and the rest of Czechoslovakia was seized and, in the same month, Memel. On September 1st Danzig returned to the Reich and Germany invaded Poland. The war that Hitler, when Neurath was his Minister, had avoided for five years, Ribbentrop plunged him into in the space of eighteen months.

Such swift execution of murderous designs on the rights and independence of weaker nations cannot be regarded as merely coincidental with his appointment. The Führer had found the right implement for the job and the new Foreign Minister, smarting from rebuffs in England, immediately set about his work with a will. Hitherto, there had been violence within the Reich : mass murder, sequestration, robbery, repression and torture. As, however, a man who is accustomed to sit in his shirt-sleeves at home will regard the conventions as an intolerable burden in public, so a policy of internal violence in a State sooner or later must have its reflex in external affairs. When Germany was rearmed Baron Konstantin von Neurath, a diplomatist of the pre-Nazi school, was found to be too moderate, or too timid, for wholesale aggression. He was displaced and Ribbentrop filled the bill. Before March 1938 there were treaty violations : the entry into the Rhineland, conscription and rearmament ; much thunder without lightning, fearsome threats short of actual attempts at expansion or conquest by force of arms. The time had come to accelerate the pace and to extend the bullying and the brigandage, so necessary for the spread of Nordic Kultur, to others in fulfilment of the Führer's role as the chosen prophet of a semi-divine mission.

This pseudo-divinity of Hitler—no more strange than the claim that the pagan German is the Creator's noblest product—carries us back to the deification and worship of the later Roman Emperors and might, perhaps, help to fix the stage of evolution at which the Germanic race has arrived. Whether it be merely the careful device of a genius ■ secure immunity for wrongdoing and to consolidate a credulous public, or one

of Hitler's beliefs, it does not extend to Ribbentrop and the other rulers of Germany, and is consequently of importance as a feature which distinguishes them from their Führer. Some of the inner circle are just sadists; some are undoubtedly megalomaniacs, whose bent of ferocity takes a particular direction because of a fostered grievance or an unnatural hatred—of Czechs, for instance, or of Jews. But, all in all, and especially in the case of a normal, educated man like Ribbentrop, none of Hitler's satellites may be excused on the plea that his mental state does not qualify him to distinguish between right and wrong.

Now superficially, Hitler has performed a miracle in Germany. He reawakened a depressed and despairing nation, banished unemployment and raised his people to a new manhood in face of as great difficulties as ever man had to meet. He has also done incalculable wrong. But, whatever of good or evil he has done, it has been accomplished by him alone. It has been his voice; not the voice of the inventive Dr. Goebbels; the brutalities were his, not those of Goering, the apostle of brute force, or Himmler the sadist, or of Streicher the Jew-baiter. And the external policy of Germany remains the policy of the author of *Mein Kampf*, with the executant, Ribbentrop, recklessly urging haste.

All these men who surround the Führer and, in more or less degree, share his confidence and his guilty burden, have had their say in an appalling sequence of events during the last seven years. They have been more than accessories; more than mere ardent supporters of the malefactor-in-chief. They are willing and active participants in his crimes, without even the excuses that are sometimes urged for him. They have deliberately created situations in which he has been forced to act as those situations demanded. They have misled him in matters in which their knowledge was—or should have been—greater than his.

This applies particularly to Ribbentrop, for he, more than the others, has had opportunities to test and to plumb opinion outside Germany. Through his residence abroad, his travels as a champagne salesman and his many diplomatic missions, he has known, to what end German policy would surely lead. History may condemn him as much for his successes as for his failures in diplomacy, but whatever judgment may ultimately be passed upon him, this much can be said: that he knew the quality of his actions.

It may be different with Hitler. Perhaps, as we used to be told, he believes his own utterances as he delivers them;

maybe he ■ not conscious, at the moment of a solemn undertaking, of his intention to break it at the first opportunity. It is just conceivable that when he made the old familiar declarations—Germany will never break the peace of Europe ; Germany has no more territorial problems in Europe ; there will be a long period of peace—his false words carried conviction to himself. If he were an ordinary man, a comparison of events with the programme of *Mein Kampf* would convict him out ■ hand, but he is not at all as other men are.

It might have been better had he been a corrupt politician but a normal human being, rather than that most dangerous of all leaders of men—the “ sea-green incorruptible ” striving to impose, by the intensity of his faith, his nightmare vision of racial domination upon Germany, Europe and the world. Adolf Hitler, the psychopathic recluse of Berchtesgaden, is emotional, sentimental, dissolving readily into tears. Insulated by his morbid introversion, by his profound ignorance and by the complexes of his warped upbringing from all contact with the enlightened thought of his own and past times, his speeches show no more comprehension of the hideous cruelties and tortures of the concentration camps ; no more pity for the victims of his régime—Jews, Communists, Poles, or Czechs—than the ravings of a homicidal schizophrone.

The key to his actions, and to the lies and treacheries with which the National-Socialist façade is disfigured, is to be found in that axiom of national immorality which has been ceaselessly drummed into the minds of present-day Germany : Right is what serves the German people. For Hitler, all moral laws are subservient to the needs of Germany and the same act which may be a wrong committed against Germany is not wrong when done by Germany to another nation. The Leader is absolved.

If Hitler can delude himself, the men of the inner circle are not deluded. If he is abnormal, the others around him are not. Most of them are ordinary, normal beings without psychological excuse for their actions. Most of them are adventurers with the common failing of reckless ambition and a lust for place and power and wealth. They obey the oracle who raised them to their high stations and are without the conscience, or the inclination, to resist his worst iniquities. In our own country we are used to the spectacle of statesmen relinquishing office and sacrificing their careers for the sake ■ their convictions. But in Nazi Germany they have no higher aim than to keep their positions and enlarge them.

Ribbentrop, though of good middle-class family, was a

successful commercial traveller with the falsely optimistic mentality of one who is ready to gain advancement by representing inferior goods to be worth more than they really are. He and his antecedents are so ordinary that he is out of place in that remarkable collection of adventurous gangsters who rule Germany under the Führer. Some of his colleagues are not natives of Germany—Hitler was an Austrian; Darré, famous for the scheme for dividing into eugenic classes all the women of Germany for stud purposes, comes from the Argentine; Hess was born in Alexandria; Rosenberg in Estonia. Goering was an air pilot who became a drug addict; Goebbels an unsuccessful journalist; Hildebrandt, Governor of Mecklenburg, a cowherd; Kaufmann, Governor of Hamburg, had been punished for wearing the ribbon of the Iron Cross without a right to the decoration; and Streicher had been convicted of offences against school-children. Fanatics some of them may be, with often one especial streak of inhumanity, but all are without the God-given mission of Adolf Hitler and without his complexes.

It behoves us, now that we are in the midst of total war, not to underrate the strength and efficiency, or the reckless desperation of these men around the Führer. Ribbentrop, smooth-tongued, accomplished, effective ■ diplomacy, has still the power to cause untold harm, and, if these violent men are allowed a say in a negotiated peace, he might conduct the German case at a conference. Meanwhile, during the war, although there are much cleverer men than he, there are few—except, perhaps, Goebbels—with so wide a field for mischief.

Hitler himself is not only an inspired opportunist; he is an acknowledged, though crooked, genius. Von Brauchitsch is a great soldier commanding a magnificent army. Goering, creator of a mighty air force, is utterly ruthless, brutal and brilliantly efficient. More subtle than them all is that Mephistopheles of propaganda, the insidious Dr. Goebbels. They must be taken seriously and none more so than von Ribbentrop. He ■ more dangerous just because of his mental limitations.

His cleverness ■ the low cunning of treachery, his artifices those ■ the card-sharper and the confidence trickster. He plays his game with those who abide by the rules but does not feel bound to observe them himself. It is not a brilliant feat of statesmanship, for instance, to lull the unsuspecting Danes into a pact of non-aggression, signed in May 1939, and then to invade their country ten months later without reason. It is not diplomacy, but infamous perfidy, to encompass the overthrow of neutrals by seducing and subsidizing traitors like

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Quisling in Norway and the Fifth Column in Holland. Unless we are willing to concede that robbery with violence affords evidence of a higher development of the intellect than industry: that treachery and fraud are above probity and straight dealing, we cannot see anything meritorious in the acts of violence committed against Poland and the Low Countries: or anything more than the mere adroitness and perverted dexterity of the cheat. And the silly, almost puerile pretexts Ribbentrop advances to cover them serve only to emphasize the poverty of a mind that has missed a beat in the normal process of evolution. He was born two thousand years too late.

It is the foreign policy of Hitler, and only of Hitler, that Ribbentrop has carried out. But it would be a mistake to assume that in doing so he has been merely passively acquiescent and dumb in council. He has been for many years the confidential adviser of the Führer in foreign affairs, particularly in relation to France and Great Britain, of whom his earlier career is presumed to have given him special knowledge. He has interpreted their reactions correctly in many instances, but it is only necessary to be wrong once in a matter so grave as to involve the issue of war or peace in order to turn the whole structure of diplomatic success into ghastly failure—and this von Ribbentrop has done. He has sat in the inner circle as Hitler's particular friend: one who was in a unique position to advise him as to the strength of feeling in this country, in the Dominions and in France.

He was appointed to the office of Reichsminister for Foreign Affairs on February 4th, 1938, but long before that his fingers were in the pie. It had not been expected that so orthodox a diplomatist as von Neurath would survive the drastic change to the violently revolutionary Nazi administration in 1933, but survive it he did, continuing as Minister until orthodoxy and moderation gave place to piracy. When the "Palace revolution" brought about the dismissal of many high officers of the army, amongst them von Blomberg and von Fritsch, the occasion was considered opportune for making other changes in the Administration, and Ribbentrop replaced Neurath at the Foreign Office.

His promotion caused but little surprise, for jealousy amounting almost to bitterness had long existed between the old and the new Ministers. Even before the death of Hindenburg in August 1934, Ribbentrop—whom the President contemptuously referred to as "this young fellow"—was being entrusted with the care of matters which were properly within the exclusive sphere ■ the German Foreign Office; and as the

demand upon his services grew, he extended his Bureau for Foreign Affairs in the Wilhelmstrasse, through which he acted independently and often in defiance of Neurath.

This bureau, in fact, had a curious, informal beginning, for it grew out of an organization Ribbentrop had founded within the offices of the Henkell champagne concern when he was still an active partner in the business. He had gained a little experience of diplomacy when, after being recalled from the Front to the War Ministry in 1916, he was made aide-de-camp to the German Military Mission at Constantinople. Subsequently he was attached to the German Peace Delegation at Versailles. The Party lacked members with a diplomatic tradition and, with the knowledge he had acquired in Turkey and at Versailles added to his linguistic attainments, he was able to fill a considerable gap in Hitler's equipment. At first, he was a kind of teacher of foreign policy to the Party, and when Hitler became Chancellor, the *Buro-Ribbentrop* was transferred to the Wilhelmstrasse together with a staff of forty or fifty budding Nazi enthusiasts in foreign affairs and housed in a building opposite the official Foreign Office.

By the time he became German Ambassador in London in 1936, his activities had assumed such dimensions that it appeared as if the weightier matters of State were left in his hands, while only the routine business of foreign affairs remained in charge of von Neurath. Even after he had taken up residence at the London Embassy he, instead of the Foreign Minister, was brought back to Berlin to sign the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan which he had engineered through his informal bureau. He exercised a considerable sway, therefore, in the external affairs of the Reich not only since February 1938, but also during the years of preparation which followed the assumption by Hitler of supreme power in Germany.

Great occasions often breed great men and, whether good or bad, necessity provides its own solution. In a country such as Germany, which has undergone in the space of a few years a colossal defeat in the field, culminating in revolution ; whose population has suffered impoverishment to the very verge ■ starvation ; which has witnessed in turn the overthrow of a despotic monarchy, the short reign of a republic followed by a ruthless dictatorship, it ■ but natural that the highest positions in the State should have been filled by men whose early careers have not necessarily fitted them to rule. Such national upheavals may result in the emergence of some man ■ outstanding personality whose vision and strength of purpose compensate for his lack of experience and training. Our own time

is rich in examples : Lenin and Stalin out of the chaos ■ the Russian revolution, Mussolini out of the war-wreck of Italy, and Adolf Hitler from the ruins of the German Empire. ■ It is probably safe to assert that, but for the turmoil and desolation which swept across Europe like a destroying flame in the bankrupt aftermath of the Great War, not all of these national heroes would have risen from the dismal obscurity of their dubious environments. But for that universal tragedy, Stalin might yet be a rebellious political prisoner in the wastes of Siberia ; Hitler still a dejected inmate ■ a Viennese Home for Men.

Von Ribbentrop is not a product of the bleak years which followed the war. He possesses advantages which have been denied to the giants of present-day Europe : great wealth, a good education, good manners, fluent English and French, and a modicum of Russian and Italian. These, coupled with the personal friendship and gratitude of the Führer, have placed him in the exalted position which he occupies to-day.

He was born on April 30th, 1892, at Wesel in the lower Rhineland, a small, picturesque town of 25,000 inhabitants, about twenty miles from the Dutch frontier where German territory juts into Holland. His father, Richard Ribbentrop, then a first lieutenant in the Imperial Army, was stationed there, but it was only one of a succession of garrison towns in which the exigencies of army service required the family to live. It was not long before Lieutenant Ribbentrop was ordered to Kassel, where Joachim's schooldays began.

The next move was to the fortress town of Metz and there, as at Grenoble later, young Ribbentrop attended the High School and applied himself with considerable industry to his studies, particularly to the acquisition of foreign languages. His mother's name was Sophie Hertwig before her marriage, and she was devoted to her sons, of whom one has now succeeded to Joachim's place in the Henkell champagne business—*sekt*, rather, for there ■ as much difference between the French product and the German as between butter and margarine. Joachim ■ the elder brother and has the same pale blue eyes as Frau Ribbentrop, the same waxy, fair complexion ; and to her he owes much of the charm of his manner.

In spite of the interruptions his father's profession ■ arms entailed in his schooling, his progress was encouraging without being in any way brilliant, and he showed from the first considerable aptitude at various sports. At the age of sixteen he steered the German bobsleigh team in the Swiss competition ; not, however, to victory. The fact is that he was a quite

ordinary, reasonably intelligent and healthy boy. Meanwhile, his mother detected in him a talent for music and he was taught to play the violin. To this day he is acknowledged in Berlin as a polished performer: a distinction which he shares with his rival Nazi virtuoso, Ernst Hanfstaengl. He has often played to the Führer to soothe him in his moods of deep depression.

By 1909 his schooldays in Germany were over. His father had retired from the army after a career of moderate distinction, and Frau Sophie Ribbentrop was ambitious for her eldest son's future. They were not wealthy and possessed but little more than the retired officer's pay. Joachim's proficiency in English and French brought an offer from the school authorities to send him abroad to perfect his knowledge of French, and his parents accepted it gladly.

He was sixteen years old at this time, and after spending a year or more at Grenoble and in Switzerland, he came to England, where he lived in the home of a tutor. His time was put to good account, for when he returned to Germany he spoke excellent English, with scarcely a trace of a guttural pronunciation, and his knowledge of grammar and style was far superior to that of an average educated Englishman. At the age of eighteen he was finished with schools and tutors, and the time was come for him to make choice of a career.

The army tradition was strong, members of his family for many generations having been good soldiers of Germany. The name of one of his ancestors, Barthold Ribbentrop, appears as the representative of the Count of Lippe on the Treaty of Westphalia, which brought to an end the Thirty Years War. That war was begun, like the present one, by a fanatical ruler who tried to impose his own narrow ideology—Jesuitical in his case—his conception of the totalitarian State, and his territorial ambitions, upon Central Europe.

Perhaps the best known and most distinguished of the line was Baron Friedrich von Ribbentrop, of the branch which later, by adoption, was to provide Joachim with his title of Freiherr von Ribbentrop. Friedrich was State Counsellor in charge of the Prussian Army Service in the time of the famous Marshal Bluecher, under whom he served at the battle of Waterloo. The end of the Napoleonic Wars brought a peace treaty which required the restoration of valuable art treasures looted from the galleries and museums of Germany by Napoleon in his victorious campaigns, and Friedrich von Ribbentrop was entrusted with a mission to Paris to collect and bring them back to their rightful home.

■ ■ not surprising that with such a family history, a career in the army, or at least in the service of Germany, should be envisaged for young Ribbentrop. In the army his knowledge of languages would help him, and his father's family connections would give him an auspicious start. At one time there was little hesitation about what the choice would be, but during his absence in England, family differences arose and ■ became necessary for him to earn his own living.

He was not keen on becoming a soldier. He had lived in England, Switzerland and France and he wanted to see more of the world. In spite of the great strides Germany had made in commerce and industry about the year 1910, and the returning prosperity of the country, he could not see much prospect of success in commercial circles for the son of a retired officer. Greater opportunities were offered abroad and Europe was becoming increasingly overcrowded. Joachim's eyes turned to the openings which a vigorous new country such as Canada would afford to a healthy young man of energy and ambition. Evidently the problem of *lebensraum* about which, as Foreign Minister, he has since been tiresomely eloquent, is no new one to Ribbentrop.

He decided to try his fortune in Canada and set sail for America, not with the proverbial shilling in his pocket, but yet with no great store of worldly goods.

## CHAPTER II

### HIS PART IN THE GREAT WAR AND AFTERWARDS AS CHAMPAGNE SALESMAN ; THE ENNOBLING " VON "

**J**OACHIM at eighteen was not frightened of hard work and, before long, found employment at Quebec. The great steel bridge over the St. Lawrence River was in course of construction, and failing the offer of any higher occupation, this son of a retired officer of the Kaiser's army literally stripped off his coat and became a labourer. He worked on the giant caissons which were being placed in position to support the superstructure of the bridge, and made good at the job. The pay was as good as the work was hard, but it soon became clear to his employers that his education and ability were far above that of the polyglot crowd of his fellow-workmen. He became a clerk in the offices of the contracting engineers, then a draughtsman, and finally assistant to the clerk of works.

He stayed in this employment for over a year ; then went to Montreal, where he obtained a position as clerk in a bank. In 1913 he moved to Ottawa and opened a general export business, which he carried on with some small success until the outbreak of war.

Ribbentrop soon made friends in Ottawa. He was tall, blond and good-looking ; he was a fair shot and played games well. He was a member of two of the best tennis clubs and more than once won prizes in their tournaments. His ready smile and his good manners made him a welcome guest at the house of the Chief Justice of Canada, Sir Charles Fitzpatrick, and altogether he achieved considerable popularity amongst the hospitable people of the city. He joined a luncheon club in Sparks Street, whose members met daily to argue the questions of the day, and soon he became recognized as an interesting and fluent speaker. It was in the course of one such discussion that young Ribbentrop—so the story runs—made what may have been his first serious blunder in his estimate of the foreign policy of Great Britain.

For more than a month these debates had almost inevitably

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been concerned with the growing tension in Europe, and Ribbentrop, his English now well-nigh perfect, had often taken part. The threat of war seemed remote so far as England was concerned, until one day news came of the invasion of Belgium by Germany. Ribbentrop made an excellent speech assuring his fellow-members that Britain would not enter the war. The morning papers announced the sending of the British ultimatum to Germany, expiring at midnight on the night of August 3rd-4th. Ribbentrop was missing from the club at lunch-time that day.

It is worth noting that ever since he became the Führer's confidential adviser on foreign affairs, his view of England's unwillingness to fight should always have been the same. It seems to be based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of the British character and temper, a rooted belief in their decadence and that in another time of great international conflict, the British Empire would fall to pieces like a pack of cards.

But on that day in August 1914 Ribbentrop quickly realized his mistake. He knew that within a very few hours hostilities would break out between England and his beloved Germany. Canada would not be a healthy place for a young German when the time limit of the ultimatum should expire. Hastily gathering together a few of his belongings, he took train for Halifax, there to try to find a neutral steamer bound for Europe.

Had he delayed, of course, he would have been interned as an enemy alien for the duration of the war ; but of the motives that actuated him in his precipitate flight, fear of internment was not the only one. There were also patriotism and a sincere devotion to the Fatherland. For centuries there had been Ribbentrops in the army and now his father, still on the reserve of officers, would be with his regiment at the Front. The docks of Halifax were thronged with refugees fleeing from a country which, on the stroke of midnight, would be at war. Men were clamouring for passages and being turned away : young men, English, Belgian, French, German and Russian, all bent on reaching home at the earliest possible moment to enlist in the service of their respective homelands. Ribbentrop found that no passage could be bought at any price, but he was determined and the sands were running out. He smuggled himself aboard the *Emilia*, a Dutch freighter homeward bound for Amsterdam.

The vessel had as many passengers as she could accommodate, mostly German officers and men hurrying back to report for service. Ribbentrop made his appearance before an angry

skipper when the ship was well out at sea, and persuading him to accept the *fait accompli*—how prophetic it sounds of the strategy which was to be so often successfully pursued nearly twenty years later in the Rhineland, Austria and Sudetenland!—was allowed to pay his passage money and join his fellow-passengers.

The voyage was uneventful until the *Emilia* was in the English Channel. Off Falmouth a British warship signalled her to stop and she was taken into port to be examined for contraband of war. Ribbentrop and a companion hid in the coal bunkers, while passengers and crew lined up on deck for inspection. British naval officers came aboard and examined them, and all those of German or other enemy status were taken ashore and interned. All, that is, save Ribbentrop and his companion. When the ship was well under way, they emerged from their hiding-place, grimy and covered with coal-dust, but free to return and fight for their country. The *Emilia* had been detained for two days by the naval authorities while her cargo was searched: a time of anxiety and acute discomfort for Ribbentrop. However, no other untoward incident marred the rest of the voyage and, landing in Holland, Ribbentrop crossed the frontier into Germany.

He lost no time in realizing the object of his return and reported at once to the headquarters of the 12th Regiment of Hussars. He was granted a commission as second lieutenant, and after only a short period of training, was in the front line before the year was out.

He made an excellent officer and was decorated with the Iron Cross, first class, as a reward for gallant action in the face of heavy enemy machine-gun fire. Wounded, although not very seriously, he spent a brief period in hospital; and after a short convalescence, rejoined his unit at the Front and was promoted first lieutenant.

The operations on the Western Front soon settled down into trench warfare, in which cavalry formations could not be usefully employed. Ribbentrop, himself a cavalry officer, was transferred to the Eastern Front in 1915, where the freer movement of the contending armies permitted a more profitable scope for an officer of Hussars. During nearly a year spent in fighting against the Russians, he again distinguished himself by his resource and bravery in action and, this time, received the second class of the same order.

Towards the end of 1915 he was recalled to Berlin, where he was given a post in the Ministry of War.

The authorities quickly realized that however efficient he

might be as an officer in the field, the services of a man of his education and ability, particularly one with his knowledge of languages, could be put to greater use in another sphere. Count Bernstorff was then the German Ambassador at Washington, and serving under him as Military Attaché was Captain Franz von Papen. Under cover of the Embassy, Papen, in conjunction with Captain Boy-Ed, von Rintelen and Trebitsch Lincoln, directed a widespread campaign of espionage and sabotage throughout the United States. He had been so employed since the outbreak of war, and before that in Mexico, but the flagrant abuse of the diplomatic privileges accorded by a friendly Power to the accredited representatives of Germany had aroused the grave suspicions of the American Government. Formal protests against the activities of Papen and Boy-Ed were lodged in Berlin and their days in Washington seemed to be numbered.

It was necessary to ensure the continuance of their nefarious work in case they should be compelled to leave the United States, and von Papen sent an urgent request for additional help. Ribbentrop was ordered to proceed to Washington, charged with a secret military mission.

The extraordinary devices employed by Germany's ill-famed Military Attachés and their shady collaborators have been fully exposed by von Rintelen and others and have no place in this narrative. Their task was to interrupt the flow of munitions and war material from the United States to the Allies by every means in their power, regardless of all the usages of international decency in war, the laws of neutrality and the lives and rights of non-belligerents. Germany was feeling the dire effects of the stranglehold imposed upon her by the British and French blockade. Factories in America were working overtime on huge contracts for the supply of implements of war to the Allied Powers ; every port was choked with the traffic, quays piled high with munitions waiting to be loaded into the holds of ships destined for England, France and Russia. Although the U-boats were exacting a heavy toll, as yet they could not sufficiently impede the continuous flow of material and arms for use on the battlefields against the Germans in the trenches. Germany made ineffectual protests to Washington and, because the Allied blockade prevented her from competing in the American market, she had to watch supplies and munitions which she could afford to buy but could not carry, being safely transported in immense quantities to her enemies.

The Germans sought to interrupt the traffic in arms from America by outrages of sabotage hitherto undreamed ■ by

any civilized nation. Papen, secure within the diplomatic fold, was in charge of the operations and contrived a network of spies and agents in every port and centre of industry in the United States. To him came reports from the factories, from the steamship offices and from the ports, with details of contracts, output, destination and sailing dates. Strikes were fomented, machinery damaged, factories blown up, railway bridges destroyed, trains derailed—all the work of agitators and saboteurs on the pay-roll of von Papen. Von Rintelen even formed a new trade union with the object of spreading discontent amongst the workers.

Infernal machines were placed amongst the arms and ammunition in the holds of ships sailing for Europe, and mysterious explosions sent vessel after vessel to the bottom of the sea. Every stoppage of work, every sunken ship and every wrecked train meant less munitions for the enemies of Germany. Huge contracts were placed by German agents for material which could never reach Germany, solely to divert from the Allies the produce of the factories and armament workshops. Millions of pounds were spent in these diverse ways to prevent American manufacturers from fulfilling their contracts and the Allies from receiving the war equipment for which they had paid.

The sabotage campaign was in full swing when Lieutenant Ribbentrop presented himself at the German Embassy at Washington. He had crossed the Atlantic in a submarine, a somewhat hazardous undertaking in those days. And he was not fully informed of the purport of his mission.

Papen received him cordially, and wasting but little time over the ceremonies of introduction, plunged straightway into an exposition of the duties which would be required of him. Papen was inured to the baseness of his calling and there was, for him, no qualm in causing the deaths of thousands of neutral Americans in bomb explosions, railway disasters, or the loss of ships at sea. He was now up to the hilt in sabotage. And both men, meeting for the first but by no means the last time, were smiling as they smoked their cigars and sipped the Embassy's wine, each conscious of the other's charm. Papen continued to smile as he developed his theme, but Ribbentrop's face froze as he listened to the cool, shameless catalogue of atrocity and outrage which the other calmly unfolded.

Early in the war, Ribbentrop had begged to be excused from undertaking espionage; now he was to be entrusted with meaner, more degrading work. But the protest he uttered was useless; the new military attaché must obey blindly the orders

which his secret mission entailed. Papen reminded him of his paramount duty to his Fatherland.

The activities of von Papen and Captain Boy-Ed were known by now to the State Department at Washington, and already a demand for their recall had been made to Berlin. Ribbentrop was at once initiated into the workings of the sabotage system, made himself familiar with all its sordid ramifications and met the men with whom he must collaborate. Von Papen left America on December 21st, 1915, and Ribbentrop set himself to spread further the trail of destruction in the towns and cities of America.

For a while much greater circumspection than the careless von Papen had shown was necessary. Shortly before Ribbentrop's arrival, Papen's offices outside the protecting walls of the Embassy had been raided by Secret Service agents of the United States and much valuable documentary evidence seized, incriminating members of the staff of saboteurs and large numbers of the German community in America. Von Rintelen had been arrested while on his way home and interned in England; von Papen's baggage was searched by the British Secret Service during his voyage back to Germany, resulting in further grave disclosures of the complicity of Germans living in the United States; the American Press was filled with denunciations of the conspirators and their dastardly crimes, and anti-German demonstrations became more and more frequent and menacing throughout the country. Ribbentrop found it hard to obtain the services of saboteurs in spite of the high pay which was offered.

The increasing vigilance of American officials, aided by the damning proofs of guilt furnished by an extremely efficient British Intelligence Service, led to the arrest and punishment of hundreds of spies and saboteurs, and every fresh disaster brought more arrests and fed the growing tide of resentment amongst the American people. The penalty of death was ordained for sabotage, and spies and saboteurs became scarcer with each new manifestation of the States' determination to punish them and put a stop to the organized murder of thousands of innocent citizens.

For months von Ribbentrop worked in circumstances ■ greater difficulty than had existed in the time of Rintelen, Papen and Boy-Ed. His special branch of the work concerned the wrecking of transport and munition factories. But the temper ■ the American nation was rapidly working up to a climax, and by the end of 1916 they were moving nearer to a break with Germany. The German Ambassador at Washing-

ton, Count von Bernstorff, was at last recalled, following an imperative demand from the Government of the United States, and Ribbentrop went about the same time.<sup>1</sup>

Ribbentrop had not been back in Germany long before he was ordered to report to Commandant von Papen, then a staff officer attached to the Fourth Army Corps in Turkey. He went at once to Constantinople, appointed *aide-de-camp* to the German Military Mission under General Hans von Seeckt. Papen is credited with having been the author ■ an ambitious plan for exploiting the religious feelings of the Moslem races by raising disaffection against the Allies and against Britain in particular. The plan had been adopted by the German General Staff and the effect of it had been seen in risings against the British in Africa and in a new determination to effect a serious onslaught by the Turks against the Suez Canal and Egypt. Success in the canal zone would bring nearer the old dreams of German hegemony in Asia Minor and lead, perhaps, to a revolt against British rule amongst the Moslems of India. But what risings had taken place had been quickly suppressed by the British, and neither in the campaign in Mesopotamia nor the attack on the Canal were the Turks, led by German generals, able to make headway. There were serious divergences of views between the German High Command and the Turkish generals, several of whom, including Mustapha Kemal and Djemal Pasha, refused to submit to German supremacy in the direction of the war in Palestine. Contrary to all von Papen's theories, the attempt to incite a Holy War against the British failed, and the Arabs of the Hejaz revolted against the Turks, materially strengthening the operations of the Allies in their drive towards Jerusalem.

The differences between the German and Turkish commanders were eventually composed, but one result of their lack of unanimity was the withdrawal of the Turkish Army group to which von Papen was attached, into reserve at Constantinople. There he pursued his plans with the aid of a special staff, amongst whom it was necessary to include agents experienced in espionage. Lieutenant Ribbentrop, fresh from his sabotage exploits in America, was an ideal instrument for the kind of service which von Papen needed. Tall and of an athletic build, blessed with good looks and considerable charm—an accomplished linguist, too—he was a success with women. His duties were of the orthodox, romantic type of espionage, more suited to his talents than sabotage; requiring him to frequent the best class resorts of cosmopolitan society in

<sup>1</sup> *Franz von Papen*, by H. W. Blood-Ryan.

Constantinople and the hotels and smart restaurants of other neutral cities. In these places he extracted valuable information from officials and the wives of people in high places, passing it on to von Papen and earning the commendation of his superior officers. At this time, the conceit which has since distinguished him, due to a series of spectacular successes in business, in society and in the field of diplomacy, had not spoiled his attraction for the other sex. Women readily parted with their husbands' secrets to the glamorous, flaxen-haired young man, unwittingly contributing to the furtherance of the deep-laid schemes of von Papen in neutral countries.

But the vigilance of the Allies and the resounding victories of General Allenby caused the great plan to miscarry and in Palestine, through the defeat of the Turks, Germany suffered her most serious reverse. The progress of the British forces under Allenby brought them within sight of Jerusalem towards the end of 1917. Soon they would sweep forward, their flank covered by the Arab Legions, to the triumph of the capture of Damascus and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The Turkish Fourth Army, withdrawn from reserve, was entrenched in the hills surrounding the Holy City, whither von Papen as a member of the German Staff, and the *aidé-de-camp*, Lieutenant Ribbentrop, had come. It was fortunate for von Papen that Ribbentrop was there to save him from capture when the irresistible advance of the British drove the Turco-German armies out of Jerusalem. As it was, the German Staff did not realize in time that General Allenby's final onslaughts on key positions commanding the city had rendered their stay so hazardous. Preparations for their departure were being made for the next day, which was just a day too late ; and von Papen retired to rest, secure in the belief that he had plenty of time for a good night's sleep. In the morning he would collect his papers, burn certain important documents and make a leisurely exit, befitting the dignity of a Prussian aristocrat and an officer on the German Staff.

In the small hours of the night he was wakened by the shouts of Ribbentrop, warning him that the British were entering the city and urging him frantically to turn out. There was not a moment to lose ; delay would mean capture. Papen protested sleepily, saying that the orders were to leave Jerusalem ■ the afternoon.

Ribbentrop, in a frenzy of haste, was insistent and at last ■ dawned on Papen that his situation was serious. He would dress at once, pack his belongings and be ready to move off in ten minutes.

There was not even time for that, Ribbentrop declared; it was a question of seconds only, not minutes, for the British were almost on top of them. He hustled the now thoroughly scared officer, attired only in pyjamas and slippers, into a waiting lorry with the enemy on their heels.

Papen's baggage was left behind, so for the second time he lost his papers and allowed them to fall into enemy hands. It is said that when his room was searched on his return from America, documents were found which led to the arrest of forty of his collaborators. Now, the number of victims of his carelessness was more than doubled. Throughout his long career, indeed, there are few of his colleagues, beside Ribbentrop, who have succeeded in escaping the fate which association with him has so often entailed.<sup>1</sup>

The end of the war found Ribbentrop at Constantinople and on his return to Germany, he did not long remain in the army. For a time he was stationed at Munich where, according to more than one account, he and Alfred Rosenberg were charged with the duty of attending the meetings of the many new political societies which sprang up after the November revolution, in order to report upon the trend of their policies. Their appearance, however, made them too conspicuous for the task, inviting the suspicions of the workers; and finding an intelligent and willing corporal fanatically opposed to Communism, who seemed to be better qualified for the work than they, the duty was deputed to him. This deputy was none other than Adolf Hitler. It can be stated that this story is not inconsistent with the less circumstantial version which attributes to Captain Roehm the credit for the discovery of "the greatest German of all time."<sup>2</sup>

There is another story current of a second meeting between Hitler and Ribbentrop in the early days after the war. It was at the time of the Kapp *putsch* in Berlin early in 1920. Ribbentrop by this time had left the army and was busily occupied in selling the Henkell-Trocken champagne with which his name has since become so widely associated. To his office in Berlin there came an unnamed visitor, who turned out to be the adventurer and spy, Trebitsch Lincoln, with whom Ribbentrop had had dealings in America. The rising had failed and Wolfgang Kapp was in flight. Trebitsch had two companions with him—Adolf Hitler and Dietrich Eckhart, who had been sent from Munich to make contact with the Nationalist leader. Now, the retreat of all three was cut

<sup>1</sup> *Franz von Papen*, by H. W. Blood-Ryan.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

off and the city was in the hands of the Government's supporters.

Ribbentrop was asked to smuggle them out of Berlin. An ordinary car would be useless in such an emergency and some kind of disguise was essential. He procured workmen's clothes for them and packed them off in one of the firm's delivery vans, which bore the words: "Henkell-Trocken Champagne," in bold letters on its sides.

However, the meeting between Hitler and Ribbentrop which led to the present close political association — the two men did not take place for some years, when the portents seemed to predict a great future for Hitler, and Ribbentrop decided to hitch himself to the National-Socialist wagon in time to share in the triumph. Meanwhile, in the spring of 1919, peace was still awaiting the deliberations of the victorious Powers and Ribbentrop was appointed *aid-de-camp* to the military experts who accompanied the German Peace Delegation to Versailles. He owed his selection to his perfect English and French, his excellent record as an officer on active service and to the successes he had achieved in his missions to the United States and to Turkey. The post was a minor one and when the treaty was signed he found himself unemployed.

There was, however, one matter which was causing him much distress: a scandal about his good name as an officer which must be disposed of before he would feel free to commence a new career.

There were persistent rumours around Berlin imputing to him a charge of desertion from his regiment, and as soon as he became free from his duties at Versailles, he took steps to clear himself of the false accusations against his honour. His mission to America had been secret, and his unexplained absence had given rise amongst his brother officers to the belief that he was one of the many casualties which were officially described as "Missing." As with all Secret Service men, even his commanding officer was kept in ignorance of his activities abroad, and matters had been further complicated by the carelessness of an official at the Ministry of War, who neglected to forward to the proper quarter the usual notification of his return to his normal duties. In the regimental records, Lieutenant Ribbentrop was noted as "absent without leave."

One of the earliest acts of the new revolutionary Government was to declare a general amnesty for, amongst others, all military offenders. Instead of receiving any benefit from this act of clemency, Ribbentrop found that — prevented the

hearing of his case and deprived him of the chance of rehabilitation. He therefore applied to the Ministry for his case to be heard, but was informed that as the amnesty covered disciplinary action against officers of the army, the matter was already settled and there was no tribunal with power to deal with it.

The stigma on his reputation therefore remained, but he was determined not to leave a stone unturned in his efforts to re-establish his honour. He went to see his former chief, the resourceful von Papen, to consult with him as to what course might be adopted to compel a hearing. Papen remembered the service which his junior had rendered him in effecting his escape from the British at Jerusalem. He intervened in his favour to such purpose that within eight days a Military Court of Honour was convened, empowered to adjudicate on the charge. Papen himself conducted Ribbentrop's case, testifying as his superior officer to the services he had given to Germany during the period of his alleged desertion.

A favourable verdict was promulgated in due course, the court declaring that "during the war Lieutenant Ribbentrop conducted himself in exemplary fashion, and under superior orders rendered such services to his country that had the war not ended prematurely, he would, beyond all doubt, have merited a high imperial distinction."<sup>1</sup>

This tardy act of justice completely restored the family name, and the Ribbentrops, father and son, could both contemplate with pride and satisfaction their record in the war. Richard Ribbentrop had fought throughout the campaign on the Eastern Front, distinguished himself at the battle of Brzeziny, and had risen to the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

Thrown on his own resources again, Joachim was now faced with the difficult task of finding a means of earning a livelihood in a land which war and revolution had bled almost white. Conditions in Germany at this time were deplorable, with industry completely at a standstill and quite unable to absorb a tithe of the millions of soldiers thrown out of employment by the peace. Raw materials and many vital commodities were practically un procurable; money was scarce and the whole economic structure of the State was in ruins. What applied to Germany applied to her neighbours in Europe with, in many instances, even greater force. Moreover, even though the factories had been able to produce goods, there was no market for them in foreign countries and no export trade.

Ribbentrop, however, had proved himself to be shrewd in

<sup>1</sup> *Franz von Papen, supra.*

business affairs during his earlier years in Canada and he did not lack initiative. He realized the hopelessness of obtaining employment in the business houses of Germany, crippled as they were, both in finance and in their means of production. But he knew that, with trading between the belligerent countries prohibited for the last five years, there must be gaps in the representation of foreign exporting firms whose goods would find a ready sale in Germany.

In his general export business in Canada he had dealt in a small way in wines, and now he had made the acquaintance of the Marquis de Polignac, the head of an important firm of manufacturers of champagne in Rheims. He lost no time in turning this acquaintanceship to his own advantage in order to obtain for himself the representation of the firm's goods in Germany. He secured an agency for the world-famous Pommery brand of champagne and became, about the same time, agent for a celebrated brand of Scotch whisky.

Impoverished as Germany was as the result of the war, there were still men in that country who had profited vastly by it: the armament magnates and the war profiteers. Night clubs flourished in Berlin, and the fashionable restaurants and bars were filled with customers with money to burn. There was a good sale for the best French champagnes, far superior as they are to the cheaper brands of German manufacture. Johnny Walker, too, was still going strong. The suavity and easy manners of Ribbentrop were excellent qualifications for a commercial traveller, whose business required him to call upon people who counted in the social world; and he was a great success amongst the *élite* of Berlin and other cities. He had always dressed well, he was good-looking and a fluent conversationalist. His residence in other countries—England, France, Switzerland, Canada and Turkey—had given him sang-froid and a cosmopolitan polish which helped to make him a first-rate salesman. Even during the first year of the new Republic of Germany under President Ebert, he prospered and—more important to his future—made contacts with influential people not only in Germany, but in France as well. He met men who were later to become ardent advocates in France of Franco-German goodwill. The Marquis de Polignac, who became chairman of the Franco-German Fellowship in France some years later, took a liking to him, and through the medium of the exclusive vintages he sold, he obtained entry into the houses of the big business men of Germany. As a commercial traveller he was an undoubted success.

Curious to relate, when Ribbentrop became Ambassador in

London he did not relinquish his position as salesman for Pommery; even when he was made Minister for Foreign Affairs he continued to be their nominal representative. And his name is still—or certainly was, up to the time of the outbreak of the present war—on the Pommery and Greno books as their agent.

It was not long before Ribbentrop's successful activities in trade attracted the jealous attention of Germany's biggest champagne magnate, Otto Henkell. There were two great firms marketing German champagne: Kupferbergs, with their well-known Kupferberg-gold label; and Henkells, selling the more famous Henkell-Trocken brand. But no amount of patriotism could ever persuade the restaurant proprietors, and even the docile German public, that the *sekt* of these two rival concerns was not greatly inferior to the excellent French vintages which Ribbentrop peddled. The sales of Pommery in Germany rapidly increased and both Henkell and Kupferberg naturally looked with disfavour on this new and disturbing competitor. Henkell and the future Foreign Minister of the Third Reich met several times, with the result that the latter received an invitation to visit the Henkell mansion.

Otto Henkell may conceivably have had an eye to business when he issued his invitation. It is just as probable that he was genuinely attracted by the pleasing personality and manners of Ribbentrop, who was young, good-looking and always so well groomed. His travels had broadened his outlook and made him an interesting talker. In fact, he possessed all the outward attributes for success in the social world. But little did Otto Henkell foresee the instant success that would follow Joachim's introduction to the household.

That evening he met Anna Elisabeth Henkell, the champagne king's daughter. He begged to be allowed to call upon her again the next day and that visit was the forerunner of many others. There was no time lost by either, Joachim being irresistibly attracted by the charm of Fräulein Henkell and realizing to the full the advantages which would accrue from a marriage with a daughter of the Henkell millions; she, fascinated by the apparent perfections of so polished a suitor. She was genuinely fond of him, and from every point of view the match seemed to be an ideal one. His family was quite as good as hers although, without great wealth, many doors were not yet open to him. He was well on the way to success in business, and his career in the army and in the Ministry of War had not been without distinction. With his blue eyes and blond hair, his assured manner and smiling good looks, he was

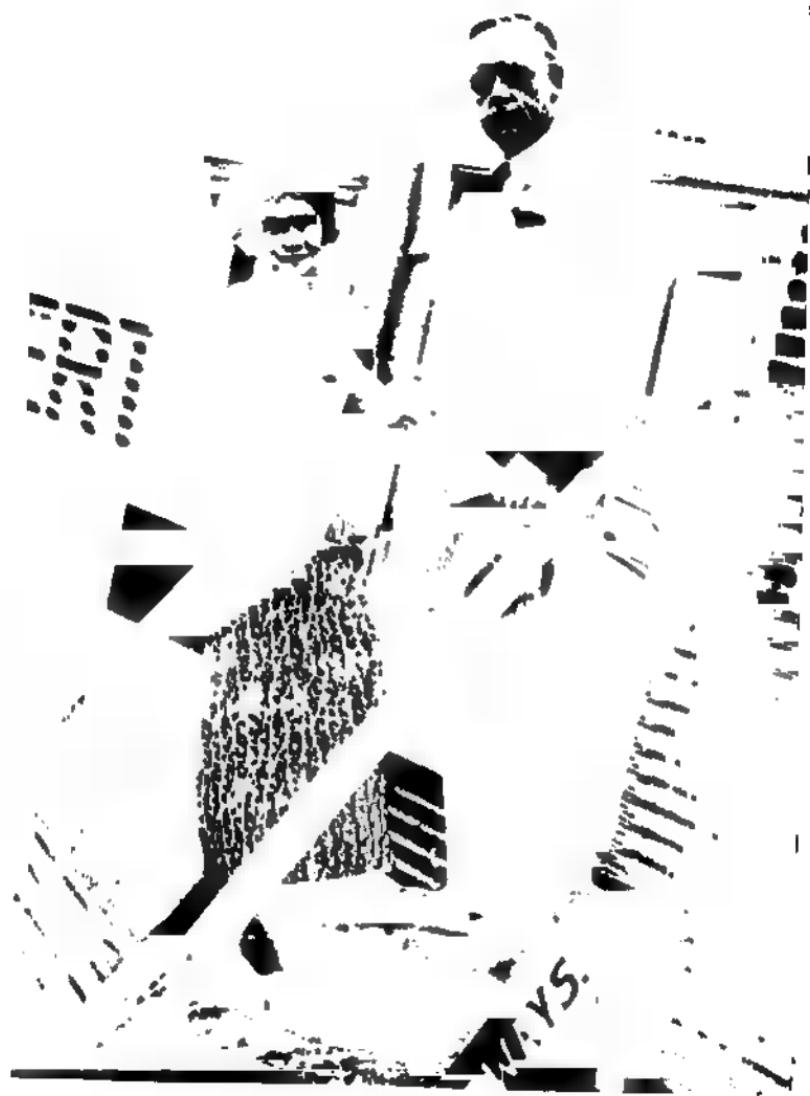
eligible socially and her father's money would help him ■ business, as well as assure them both a place in society.

"Floechen" Henkell never had any hesitation. She, too, was blessed with good looks, a good figure, and had what many German women lack: the art of knowing how to wear clothes to the best advantage. She could afford to buy her gowns in Paris and she had taste in dress. She was vivacious, intelligent beyond the average and, as yet, was without the scar on her face which makes her always seem now to be slightly frowning. That scar is the result of several operations for sinus trouble and to some extent robs her of her pleasing looks.

The two lovers came quickly to a complete understanding, but there was still old Otto Henkell to be persuaded to give his consent to the union. At first, there was an absence of enthusiasm on his part. Ribbentrop, eminently personable in himself and shrewd in business matters as he certainly was, was comparatively poor and the match was scarcely one which Henkell had hoped a daughter of his to make. But Anna was more than a match for her father. She forced the fight into the enemy's ground and demanded that Joachim be given a chance in the family business; and Henkell capitulated. Joachim was taken into the Henkell firm as export sales manager and quickly proved his worth. He came to London and sold the cheap Henkell-Trocken champagnes to the hotels and night clubs of the West End.

The wedding was celebrated within only a few weeks of their first meeting, and Joachim and his wife went to live in the Rhineland. This was in 1920, and in the following year their eldest son, Rudolf, was born. Ribbentrop was now touring Europe, selling the Henkell-Trocken brand of champagne, visiting the big capitals of every country and establishing connections with wealthy and influential people which were to be of the greatest value to him in his subsequent climb to power.

There seems to be, at first sight, little connection between champagne and successful diplomacy; but ■ is true that champagne is the acknowledged aristocrat of all the varied goods which travellers carry. It is beyond the poor man's purse and the salesman has no need to fawn on small tradesmen to obtain his orders. He mixes with men of wealth and position almost on equal terms; travels in luxury, spends freely and is royally entertained. His vocation seems to avoid the stigma of the drummer and commercial, and when he happens to be the son-in-law of the head of a wealthy firm,



BERR AON KIEGENTROP AND HIS WIFE



his welcome is assured. When Ribbentrop was Ambassador to the Court of St. James, great ladies and exalted personages were able to forget that he had been in trade.

He extended the firm's business, earning the gratitude and approbation of Henkell, entering with easy assurance the best houses in Paris, London, Rome, Warsaw and Vienna. One of the important people with whom his business brought him in contact at this time was Herr Thyssen, the Rhineland armament magnate who, from quite an early date, helped to finance Hitler's party in its struggle for power. Such ■ the importance of champagne. But there is nothing discreditable in being a commercial traveller. Indeed, in Germany, Ribbentrop used often to be publicly and proudly referred to as the "travelling salesman of National Socialism."

In 1922 another child was born to the Ribbentrops—Bettine. Ribbentrop bought the beautiful white villa at Dahlem, No. 9 Lentze Allee, in which he lives when affairs keep him ■ Berlin. Dahlem is a select suburb five miles south of Berlin and is also the home of Heinrich Himmler, his bosom friend. It was in the pastorate of Niemoller, the outspoken critic of Nazi methods and aims, who is still confined in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen. He was Ribbentrop's friend as well as his pastor before religion in Germany was nazified, but that did not save him from imprisonment. The Rev. L. Hildebrandt, a minister for three and a half years in the parish, has said that Niemoller's refusal to baptise one of the Ribbentrop children was amongst the reasons for his arrest. Adherence to any form of religious worship is discouraged amongst the followers of Hitler for fear that it may make their consciences too tender for the stern and questionable tasks they are called upon to undertake in the name of German Kultur, and Ribbentrop, subservient to every wish of his Führer, had ceased to be a member of the Church. Pastor Niemoller could not therefore see his way clear to carry out the baptism despite the personal appeal of Ribbentrop.

The house at Dahlem was partially rebuilt and enlarged. He acquired a large estate in the country and here, at Sonnenburg, a swimming pool was added, tennis courts and a golf course were laid out. He began to entertain on a considerable scale and his wife proved herself to be an excellent hostess. Important people came to their parties: diplomats, officials, leaders of fashionable society and men whose names stood high in business circles in Germany. Lord d'Abernon, who was the British Ambassador in Berlin when Stresemann and Briand came so near to realizing a lasting understanding

between France and Germany, sometimes played tennis there with Ribbentrop and was a frequent visitor. But many doors still remained closed. There was one thing lacking to the socially ambitious Frau Ribbentrop and her successful spouse.

That same Friedrich, ancestor of Joachim in the time of Field-Marshal Bluecher, had been ennobled for his service in the Napoleonic wars. He became Baron Friedrich von Ribbentrop, and the title had descended to Joachim's uncle who, though married, was childless. As there was no heir in the direct line, the title would lapse in the course of time. But according to the laws of Germany it is possible to ensure the continuance of a title by adoption; and upon this title Frau Ribbentrop set her ambition. She urged Joachim, who needed very little persuading, to approach his aristocratic relatives with a view to adoption. He became at once attentive to his elderly aunt, visiting her and making her expensive presents. The presentable son-in-law of the wealthy Henkall appeared in every way to be a suitable successor to the fast expiring title of nobility, and Joachim easily persuaded her to take the necessary steps to ensure the succession to him. The accommodating Frau von Ribbentrop died in convenient time, and in 1926 the climbing Joachim duly became the Freiherr von Ribbentrop.

He has every right to the title according to the German laws of nobility and, although he is not in the direct line of descent from the last holder, they both had a common ancestor. He appears to have as much justification for the use of the coveted "von" as many of our own recent nobility have to their peerages; and the doubts which have sometimes been expressed as to the validity of his claim to it rest on a misapprehension of the rules of succession in Germany. The revolution brought about the abolition in most titles, or a serious modification in them, but illogically allowed the retention of such particles as *zu* and *von*. In the old Imperial Germany the full title accorded to him would have been that Baron Joachim von Ribbentrop.

Certainly Ribbentrop's star was in the ascendant. After a successful army career he had made good in business at a time when the whole of Europe was suffering acutely from the economic earthquake that followed inevitably the misery of the Great War and when Germany was groaning under the "intolerable burdens" of reparations and the Versailles Treaty. He had made a successful marriage which brought him great wealth and a high position in the world of

business ; and now the seal of nobility was added to his triumphs, bringing the Ribbentrops—the von Ribbentrops—the social prestige which seemed to be all that was needed to fill their cup of happiness to the brim.

For many years after his marriage, Ribbentrop devoted himself to his family and to the champagne business, ■ which he became the head. At first he took no prominent part in politics, although he was an ardent Nationalist and, through the influence of Rudolf Hess, now the Führer's deputy, had strong leanings towards National-Socialism. He travelled extensively, visiting every capital and almost every important city in Europe and making many friends. In France he already had valuable connections through his position in the Pommery and Greno business and was able to use them to the advantage of the Henkell products. To be able to sell German *sekt* in the home of the genuine article was indeed an achievement ; but it was not only in France that he succeeded. Wherever he went the sales of Henkell-Trocken went up and, with them, the Ribbentrop fortune. Otto Henkell rewarded him by taking him into partnership.

Eventually Hess, who had been an active participant with Hitler in the abortive Munich *putsch* in 1923, persuaded him that his interests, which were those of industry and capital, were more likely to be furthered under a National-Socialist Government than under the régime of any other of the numerous parties in Germany. By emphasizing the national part of his programme rather than its vote-catching Socialistic side, Hitler had already obtained the support of many influential men in banking circles and in industry. One of these was Baron von Schroeder, head of an important banking concern in Cologne, who later brought about Ribbentrop's meeting with Hitler. At first sight it seems strange that the capitalists should have been willing to help a party whose programme, apart from its purely national tendency, appeared to aim at the socialization of banks and the key industries of Germany and the suppression of international capitalism. A large part of Hitler's following, which numbered millions, was composed of the depressed and impoverished middle-classes, who favoured a modified form of State Socialism. And although there may not have been anything incompatible in the union of a strong nationalism with a semi-Socialistic policy, it is not easy to understand how the National-Socialist Party could offer to protect the capitalists by reducing wages and abolishing the rights of labour, whilst at the same time satisfying the aspirations of the workmen and the dispossessed. Hitler was himself

a reactionary, with no more love for real Socialism than ■ had for the Jews ; but there was, within the Party, a strong section led by the brothers Otto and Gregor Strasser who, while embracing nationalistic principles, were inclined to attach greater importance to the radical planks of the Party platform.

That he performed the miracle of uniting under one banner two such opposites, by cajoling capital whilst gulling the industrial worker, ceases to surprise us when it is remembered that it was Hitler with his dual personality who did it : the consummate politician and the man of no moral values. The National-Socialist Party orators bawled vague, high-sounding slogans from their platforms about breaking the bondage of interest, while their Leader made concrete promises to the heads of industry to lower the living standard of the men they employed. He needed the votes of the workers as much as he depended upon big business to finance him, and he got both the money and the votes.

As ■ turned out, it was not Ribbentrop and his friends who were the eventual dupes, but the Socialist elements in the Party. With Hitler in power not only was their standard of living permanently lowered, but their rights were taken away and their trade unions smashed. The German working-man to-day is inarticulate, unable to raise his voice in any effort to ameliorate the conditions of his labour or improve his status. The old committees of representatives of employer and employed in the workshops and factories still function—in the interests of the Party and, to a small extent, of the employer. The worker members of these committees were formerly elected by their fellows under a free ballot ; but now membership is confined to nominees ■ the National-Socialist Party. In every place of business, in the banks and in the factories, even in the ships and the submarines, these committees of Party men exist to keep the worker down and deny him his freedom.

The Strasser brothers broke away from the Party in 1930 and the thin veil of any radicalism in Hitler's policy was finally rent aside by his murder of Gregor Strasser in the blood-bath of 1934.

The National-Socialist Party did not need money only for their meetings, the payment of their organizers and their propaganda. They wanted it also, in great quantities, for the support of Hitler's private army, the Storm Troops and the Black Guards, without which they would not have been able to impose their will upon the German nation. This army, after the Munich *putsch*, was reduced to very small numbers

but soon grew under the tutelage of Captain Roehm to huge proportions, until ■ numbered over 3,000,000 "soldiers" parading under the banner of National-Socialism and wearing brown-shirt uniforms. To provide for this freak creation, a bargain had to be struck between Hitler and the capitalists.

But in its early years the National-Socialist German Workers' Party, to give it its full title, was scarcely considered respectable enough to induce such men as Ribbentrop to lend it open support and participate in its activities. The failure of the Munich *putsch* in 1923 caused a set-back in its fortunes, and serious differences which arose between Hitler and Captain Roehm further impeded its progress. These two were reconciled in 1930 and from then onwards, Hitler's army and the voting strength of his party rapidly increased. But even in 1928 there were only twelve National-Socialist members of the Reichstag.

In the following year, the year in which Gustav Stresemann died, Ribbentrop met Hitler. Roehm, who had known Ribbentrop during the latter part of the war, was the intermediary, pleading with him to use his influence with the chiefs of the Ruhr industries on behalf of the Nazis. Ribbentrop felt no enthusiasm, but consented to attend a dinner party at the house of the banker, von Schroeder, in Cologne at which Hitler would be present.

Hitler did not see him only as a man of wealth and influence who might, for purely material reasons, prove useful to him. He took an immediate liking to him personally and admired him for the gifts and graces in which he himself was lacking. That Ribbentrop had travelled widely, knew important people in every capital in Europe and spoke several foreign languages perfectly, were additional attractions for him. He was a member of the *Herrenklub*, a man of the world and especially of the social world from which Hitler was as yet excluded. These attributes won the Führer's envious admiration, for he had travelled not at all, was monolingual and had spent most of the first thirty-odd years of his life in the gutter.

The two men began to meet more frequently, Ribbentrop's interest in the plans of the Leader deepening to enthusiasm as the magnetism of Hitler's remarkable personality exerted its power over him. Like the majority of Germans, he hated the Republic, despised the Social Democrats and feared the Communists. As a business man he thought that if the support of industry were given to the National-Socialists now, their interests would be protected when Hitler came to power,

and he was persuaded that with the financial support that he could bring to the cause, Hitler would win.

He enlisted the aid of powerful men in the Ruhr, earning the gratitude and winning the lasting friendship of Hitler. Whether that friendship will survive the strain of a war based on the misapprehensions which underlay the Soviet-German pact that Ribbentrop concluded we have yet to see. The Führer's gratitude has sometimes proved itself to be a perishable commodity, soluble in adversity.

## CHAPTER III

### BISMARCK, BETHMANN-HOLLWEG, AND RIBBENTROP: THE CONTINUITY OF GERMANY'S POLICY OF AGGRESSION

NOVEMBER 3rd, 1918—the last big battle of the war—the battle of the Sambre. In a great pincer movement the British and French armies sweep forward; November 5th and 6th, the last German counter-attacks the Prussian Guard strikes its last futile blow: the Allied armies press on behind their curtain of fire, blasting the machine-gunner out of their nests, bayoneting the snipers. . . . The Germans fall back steadily, halting their guns beside munition dumps. As they retreat they plaster roads and villages with shells, blow up bridges and road junctions.

Night marches by the light of burning farmsteads and the bright flashes of bursting shells. . . . a dead British officer, his eyes scooped out by rats. . . . the last, hastily-dug German trench line, abandoned with its German dead—men with knees drawn up, arms shielding the face: that curious posture of the defence reflex assumed by those who have met a quick and violent death. . . . Dead Germans chained to machine-guns—

November 9th, the German Revolution; on the 11th the Armistice. Behind the front line there are huge wire enclosures full of German prisoners: thin, wasted men with slow, dragging gait and a peculiarly unpleasant smell due more, perhaps, to deficiencies in diet than to sodden, unchanged clothing. Thousands of sick German soldiers are in the hospitals, many with the swollen feet of vitamin starvation.

For many months they could not be returned to Germany until a treaty of peace should end the war and the Armistice.

More than twenty years ago the stage was being set for the present conflict. The blockade was continued well into 1919 and therewith the first seeds of resentment were sown. In Germany there was misery and starvation, in Austria 100,000 babies died of rickets. Lord Plumer sent his famous telegram

to the Government, urging that the starvation of the Germans was unsettling the troops under his command.

And then came Versailles, with the declaration of the war guilt ■ Germany as the justification for reparations. One thousand millions to be paid before 1921 ; in 1921 Germany in default with only four hundred millions paid, then the figure fixed at 6600 millions : astronomical figures which under the pressure of facts and the cool and insistent criticism of economists, dwindled at last to a few hundred millions—paid out of borrowed money.

The genesis of German bitterness was in the prolongation of the blockade and in the Peace of Versailles. That Germany would have imposed harsher terms upon the Allies had she won the war ■ shown by the injustices she inflicted upon Russia by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and upon Rumania in the Treaty ■ Bucharest. Yet, because she would certainly have done so does not relieve the framers of the Versailles Treaty of responsibility for creating a situation full of potentialities for future discords in Europe. Versailles was no worse than a beaten militaristic nation such as Germany could expect. It is said that the seeds of future conflict might have been less vicariously sown ; that the incorporation of German minorities within arbitrarily delineated, or strategically-chosen borders might, with more circumspection, have been avoided ; that the Corridor should not have been given to Poland ; that it was unwise to force the acknowledgment of Germany's dishonour which was for ever memorialized in the war guilt clause ; and that the reparations demanded were economically unsound by reason of their magnitude. But now that the aims of Hitler's Germany have been fully revealed in the events ■ the last two years, it is reasonable also to draw certain parallels which may alter a charge of undue harshness to one ■ too great leniency.

Historical comparisons show that there ■ nothing fundamentally new in the expansionist policy of Hitler's Germany ; rather that it followed logically on the policy pursued by the nation since 1862. Whether her foreign policy be directed by ■ Bismarck under Wilhelm I, ■ Bethmann-Hollweg under the Kaiser, or the little Bismarck von Ribbentrop under Hitler, German deceit in diplomacy has not changed and the aim of Germany has been military supremacy.

In 1863 Prince Bismarck, the incarnation of Prussian hatred of democracy, declared that the great questions of the day could not be decided by speeches and resolutions of majorities, but by " blood and iron."

Blood and iron in Bismarck's Germany; guns or butter under Hitler! And in *Mein Kampf* Hitler has written: "In Might alone lies Right."

Bismarck made war deliberately, as a means to force the unity of the separate German States into a German confederation under Prussian domination. He achieved his purpose in three wars in ten years: wars which were not waged to right wrongs, but to weld into one mighty militaristic State the dozens of small German States in North and Central Europe. Each time he isolated his intended victim by means of bilateral alliances, which he purchased by territorial bribery or vain promises.

In 1864 he used an alliance with the then powerful Austrian Empire to invade Denmark and bring Schleswig-Holstein within the Prussian fold. Two years later, having tricked Austria, deluded France into neutrality, and bought off Italy with Venice as the bribe, he turned on his late ally and invaded Austria. The Prussian triumph at Sadowa brought this coldly-premeditated war of aggression to a victorious end and effectively established Prussian hegemony in the confederated German States.

France's neutrality had served its purpose well, and now ■ was her turn to be invaded. By 1870, Bismarck's design was complete and it needed only an excuse for war. That excuse was fabricated by his falsification of a telegram sent by the French Government. The Franco-German War resulted in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by Germany and the consolidation of the German Empire as it stood until 1914.

These events form the first phase of a threefold comparison.

Bismarck's work was ended by the fulfilment of a policy of calculated aggression which had created an empire in Europe out ■ a group of separate, independent, German-speaking States, and his dismissal came in 1890 because what he regarded as the whole book was only a chapter in the eyes of those whom success had made blind. His departure made way for a policy of further territorial aggrandisement. Germany, fast becoming commercially supreme in Europe, was now a great world power, whose military strength insured her against the possibility of danger to her frontiers. Peace could give her victories which no war could bring, but the impetus Bismarck had given to militarism and expansion could not be easily controlled. He had raised a dangerous nationalism in Prussia and destroyed democracy. His victories had only been made possible by fostering the raw spirit of Prussianism and extending it to the whole of modern Germany. But

the instrument which had been forged for conquest was, by the very perfection of its strength, too powerful to be held in check.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, puppet of the generals and the army, dreamed of a still greater Germany ; of the *Drang nach Osten*, Berlin-Baghdad and even Cairo ; and ■ a vast German-African Empire. The diplomacy of Bethmann-Hollweg failed with Italy but succeeded in beguiling Austria-Hungary into invading Serbia as a pretext for a world-war of Imperialistic expansion. The same statesman misjudged the temper of Britain, just as the future Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, then a young man in Ottawa, misread it. The Kaiser and his generals invaded Belgium and brought England into the Great War. Serbia was overrun, Russia and Rumania invaded and, in 1918, huge tracts of territory were taken from them by shameful treaties imposed upon them by the victors. Germany expanded in the east and in the south-east by robbing them of immense areas of their most valuable agricultural and mineral-bearing lands.

The victory of the Allies in November 1918 completes the second phase of the comparison.

The Weimar Republic arose from the ruins of the old monarchical State and the "iniquitous" Treaty of Versailles was signed in the Hall of Mirrors by the Republican leaders. But the Republic, welcomed at first by a disillusioned, war-weary people, did not realize the hopes of its well-wishers. It failed miserably to control the still smouldering elements of militant nationalism in Germany. The small standing army of 100,000 men allowed by the terms of the Peace Treaty sheltered within its ranks as many as 40,000 officers and non-commissioned officers, mostly of the disbanded Imperial Army. Instead of the Reichswehr being made the impersonal instrument of the needs and interests of the Government, it was allowed to exist as an independent, semi-political entity whose wishes must be consulted before it might be actively employed. And, alongside the Reichswehr, the private armies of the numerous political and so-called patriotic parties were condoned and permitted a legal status, so that millions of Germans were encouraged to play at being real soldiers.

In 1933 Hitler came to power. Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference, left the League of Nations and began to re-arm with utter disregard of her Treaty obligations. Conscription was introduced in 1935 and in the following year Hitler, on the advice of Ribbentrop and in violation ■ of the Locarno Pacts moved his troops into the demilitarized Rhineland.

Until the summer of 1936 everything that Hitler had done, except for Nazi collusion in the murder of the Austrian Chancellor, Dr. Dollfuss, might conceivably be regarded as consistent with a policy whose only objects were the freeing of Germany from the burden of the humiliation of the Treaty and the restoration of the German people to its proper place as one of the great nations of Europe, whose purpose was the security of the Reich rather than armed aggression against other States. Now, however, as Germany began to feel her strength returning, she cast her eyes further afield, revived the *Drang nach Osten* and looked greedily at her weaker neighbours. With the co-operation of Italy, she encouraged General Franco in his nationalist civil war in Spain, with the object of creating a Fascist bloc in the Mediterranean which would effectively cut off France from her African possessions, and thereby render hazardous any attempt by France to lend her aid in eastern and south-eastern Europe when expansion by aggression should begin. Only the totally unexpected prolongation of that disastrous conflict, and the exhaustion of Spain as a result of it, prevented the breaking of the peace of Europe in 1937.

Events had been following upon each other in bewildering succession. The Four-Year Plan for the synthetic production of raw materials to make Germany self-supporting in war had been launched. Austria had been forced to submit to Nazi control and had become independent only in name. The Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, of which Ribbentrop was the acknowledged architect, had been succeeded by the discovery of a common Italo-German policy and the adhesion of Italy to the Pact. Hitler was almost ready to defy the world.

However fast the pace from 1933 to 1937, ■ was as nothing compared with the acceleration to war which the changes of February 4th, 1938, brought about. On that day, when the quarrel between von Fritsch and von Blomberg was made a pretext for their dismissal, both the National-Socialist Government and the army were purged of every moderate element, and von Ribbentrop was made Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Third Reich.

The speed at which Hitler and von Ribbentrop drove Europe to disaster now became terrific. On March 11th, 1938, German troops marched into Austria and the Anschluss was proclaimed two days later. On September 28th the army was mobilized against Czechoslovakia. On the 30th, England, France and Italy agreed to hand over Sudetenland to Germany

and, with it, the chance of the survival of Czechoslovakia as an independent republic disappeared. Invasion of the rest of the truncated Republic came as a natural sequence in the following March, but still the gross appetite of the German Moloch was not yet satiated. "We have in Europe no further territorial demands to make"—but there are still, after the Austrians and the Czechs, Danzig and the Corridor to be wrested from Poland. So the great Left-turn to the Soviet-German Pact ■ made, Germany invades Poland on one side while Russia crosses the eastern frontiers, and the partition ■ yet another independent nation is accomplished to the glory ■ "the greatest German of all time."

Under Bismarck—Denmark, Austria and France. Under the Kaiser—Belgium, Russia, Serbia and Rumania. Under Hitler and his new Foreign Minister, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and—who next?

The ends are the same and the means as base. Bismarck falsified the Ems telegram in order to represent it as an insult from France justifying the declaration of war. Ribbentrop falsified Poland's willingness to enter into negotiations and represented it as a rejection of proffered terms which had, ■ fact, never been communicated to the Polish Government.

Bismarck used Austria as an ally against Denmark; then turned upon her and invaded her territory. Hitler concluded a ten-years non-aggression pact with Poland in 1934, providing for the settlement of all disputes by direct negotiations. "In no case shall there be an appeal to force," the Pact expressly stipulated. Yet in 1939 Germany repudiated the Pact, Ribbentrop enacted the farce of pretending to offer terms which the Poles were never intended to see, and German troops overran Poland.

But Bismarck's technique was well-nigh perfect, whilst that of his successors becomes cruder with each generation. With him, each act of aggression, part ■ a grandiose, unexposed scheme for building around the core of Prussia a great European power, seemed to the dupes of his diplomacy an end in itself. His lies deceived and the co-operation or neutrality of a neighbour who would be the next victim was skilfully secured without arousing suspicion in the mind of a temporary ally. He knew just when to hold his hand, and having achieved his ambitions, he set out to consolidate his creation by concluding a series ■ treaties which took final shape in the Triple Alliance ■ Germany, Austria, and Italy.

Compared with him, Ribbentrop is a coarse bungler. After the

conquest of Austria at Sadowa, Bismarck did not antagonize the Austrians by the imposition of humiliating terms, but treated them with great leniency. There was no triumphal march into Austria, like Hitler's vainglorious entry in March 1938. He did not force them to join the North German Confederation, nor did he force the Southern Germans to join the North. He was ruthless enough, but far more cunning than Hitler and Ribbentrop and, unlike them, who trampled on the rights of Austrians and Czechs, he did not weaken himself for his coming struggle with France by adding to Germany an alien and troublesome people.

The Triple Alliance served its purpose until Kaiser Wilhelm, a rather absurd individual with an absurd, martially up-turned moustache, assumed the mantle of the All-Highest and, urged on by the autocrats of the army, loosed a savage, unashamed imperialism upon Europe. At least, under Bismarck, a thin veil of diplomatic decency partially covered the nakedness of his predatory aims. With the Kaiser and Bethmann-Hollweg there was no pretence of decency or outward show of respect for the rights of neutrals. Necessity knows no law, was their motto, and it was put into practice in Belgium. "Whoever is threatened as we are, and is fighting for his all, can only consider how to hack his way through," was the only apology offered by Bethmann-Hollweg; and treaties became scraps of paper.

Having disposed of the Kaiser and his *Drang nach Osten* at the cost of some ten million lives and the blighting of the happiness of two or three times that number, Europe to its dismay again found itself confronted, twenty-four years later, by a more astute but equally absurd individual, with an even more absurd moustache, and with a precisely similar *Drang nach Osten*. It was the old spirit of Prussianism masquerading under a new cloak of more violent colour: within the State, racial intolerance and terrorism; outside it, the doctrine of the unlimited right of might, *qua* might, to intervene in the affairs of other independent nations and to take their territories from them by force. It was the unification of the independent German States of Central Europe under Prussian domination for which Bismarck intrigued and fought; it was supremacy over the whole of Europe that the Kaiser sought, and now Hitler's Germany makes its bid for world supremacy.

It is the methods which Germany has used to attain these ends, the cloak that Ribbentrop has worn, that claim our interest. It is a reversible cloak, so that at one moment he may appear as the friend of England and the next as her

enemy ; one day the bitter opponent of Bolshevism, the next as its sworn ally.

There has been no more fanatical exponent of the evils of Bolshevism than he. On his arrival in London as Ambassador in 1936 he made a statement to the representatives of the Press in which he declared : ". . . Communism, this most terrible all diseases—terrible because people generally seem to realize its danger only when it is too late." Thereafter he used his position as Ambassador to lecture British statesmen on what he conceived to be their duty in face of the menace of Bolshevism. Before this, as Hitler's Ambassador-at-Large, he contrived the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan, and so important was the part that he had played in bringing it to fruition that soon after his arrival in London, he had to fly back to Berlin specially to affix his signature to the pact, although the name of von Neurath, Foreign Minister of the Reich, would have given it validity.

Dr. Boetticher, head of Ribbentrop's private bureau at the Ministry of Propaganda, explained to foreign Press representatives that von Ribbentrop, as the "centraliser of the German effort against Communism," had signed the treaty instead of the Foreign Minister or Herr Hitler.

It must appear now that that same cloak of Nazi brown was lined with the particular shade of red which denotes Bolshevism ; for, three years later, von Ribbentrop is in Moscow, suing for an alliance with the Communist outcasts whom he has so long and so trenchantly denounced. It was a great triumph when the hand of Stalin grasped his, but the moment left the rest of the world wondering about the genuineness of the inspired invective which, for ten years and more, Hitler and the National-Socialists had hurled against "this most terrible of all diseases."

To some it must have seemed like the kiss of betrayal ; to others, the belated recognition of a common ethical standard by two Dictators whose actions and ideologies bore so many striking resemblances. People asked themselves whether the Russo-German Pact of August 1939 was a piece of soulless opportunism to be discarded as soon as its sinister objects were achieved ; whether Hitler, with Ribbentrop and his other advisers, would later re-kindle the fires of their pious hatred of the "vermin," "parasites," "blood-sucking spiders" and "street thieves" who, in the fervour of the search for adequate expletives, they had thus described the rulers of Red Russia ; or whether the Bolshevik bogey Hitler had been only a smoke-screen to be used in welding together a

party and inducing other nations, bitten by the same bug of anti-Communism, to unite in a common front in order to render aggression safe.

These questions must be dealt with in their proper place when we come to treat ■ the sincerity of Joachim von Ribbentrop, architect of both the Anti-Comintern Pact and the non-aggression pact with Soviet Russia.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC ; THE GERMAN EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRACY

WHILST Ribbentrop was establishing his own fortunes, Germany was experimenting in democracy and passing through a lean period of post-war reconstruction and development, political and economic. Hence a brief reminder of the events which led to the fall of the Weimar Republic and the accession to office of a National-Socialist Government under Hitler is not out of place in its bearing on both the recent foreign policy of Germany and the influence which Ribbentrop has exerted upon it.

The revolution of November 9th, 1918, was not a violent upheaval comparable in any way to the French or Russian revolutions. It was more a bloodless assumption of power by the Social Democrats at a time when order and government were in a state of chaos, and when a demoralized populace looked everywhere in vain for leadership. The old monarchical regime had crashed with the defeat of the army ; the Kaiser and his ministers were in flight.

There were some who thought that if no armistice had been granted and if the Allied armies had pushed on to Berlin ; ■ the fact of military defeat had been brought home more ruthlessly to the German people ; if the German Empire had been broken up into its constituent States—and a dozen more or less similar ifs—the baleful star of Hitler might never have arisen. These were views which commended themselves more to warriors at the base than to those at the Front, and to people at home rather than to the French and Belgian civilians whose land would have been fought over. For the German Army, though beaten, was not demoralized ; it might have stood for a winter on the Rhine.

The German people at that time knew perfectly well that their army had been finally defeated. That the German collapse was due to the revolution is a lie which was invented for purposes of propaganda, for Ludendorff had asked for an armistice on September 30th. ■ was the disclosure of this

request for an armistice which caused the revolution of November 9th; not the revolution which determined the armistice. And the legend that an unbeaten army had been stabbed in the back by the revolution was carefully manufactured by Hitler and stuffed by endless repetition into the minds, left empty by the Nazi travesty of education, of all who were not more than ten years old when the war ended. The old people, those who remembered, did not matter, for they were soon taught the wisdom of either holding their tongues or allowing themselves to be similarly stuffed.

On February 6th, 1919, the Weimar Assembly was elected by a large majority and proceeded to draft the constitution of the German Republic. It established a democratic form of government based on the free suffrages of the people, but subject to the veto of the President. There were, however, two serious flaws in the new constitution which were later to be exploited in accomplishing the downfall of the Republic. Article 48 provided that if a situation should arise in which public safety and order were in danger, the President was empowered to govern by means of emergency decrees without being answerable to the Reichstag. Moreover, the President of the Republic was to be the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. These two highly undemocratic provisions enabled the reactionaries in 1932 to defy the wishes of the lawfully elected representatives of the people and rule Germany by means of decrees signed by President Hindenburg on the advice of a Chancellor chosen by him and supported by an army of which he was Commander-in-Chief.

Yet, after the war there was much genuine idealism; a belief in liberty; in the right of the people to a due share in government, in national wealth and in education for the fuller life. And this enthusiasm for individual freedom found expression in the widespread support given early in its life to the Weimar Republic. Communism was a more serious danger at first than militarism, and the task which faced the new Government of the Social Democrats was indeed a formidable one.

A state of suspended warfare still existed during the Armistice, the Allied blockade was prolonged and strictly enforced until the Treaty of Versailles was signed in June, and part of Germany was in the military occupation of the Allies. Upwards of nine million men were rapidly demobilized, only a few being retained at various depots to help the police in their efforts to maintain order. These men were half-starved, ill-clad, without hope of work or sustenance. Tens of thousands of

them roamed the country-side or drifted into the cities and large towns, disillusioned and desperate enough to turn to the lures of Bolshevism and anarchy. Under the aegis of the remnants of the military, others formed themselves into volunteer corps of auxiliaries to help in stemming the Bolshevik invasion of Courland and the Polish inroads into Silesia. Quite a third of these *Frei-corp*s developed into bands of armed robbers, preying on an impoverished and despairing populace.

The miseries of the people deepened as the pressure of the blockade continued. They had no purchasing power, and without supplies of raw materials from abroad trade was non-existent. Industry could not cope with a tithe of the discontented soldiers returning from the war, and in the economic ruin of the nation the resources of relief were wholly inadequate to supply the barest needs of the vast army of the unemployed.

It was in such unpromising conditions that Democracy commenced its rule in Germany in 1919, and small wonder it is that serious mistakes were made by the new rulers in the first few months of the life of the Republic. But at first, the mass of the people welcomed the new order. They were utterly sick of war and ready to turn and rend the old monarchical system which had failed them and brought the German nation tottering to the brink of ruin. They had before their war-weary eyes the pattern of the great Western democracies which had stood the test of a long and devastating conflict far better than the autocratic regime of the Kaiser. They believed that such a form of government as they had chosen would commend itself to the victors and enable them to obtain more lenient terms at the Peace Conference.

That the conversion of Germany to the ideals of democracy was only temporary was due in large measure to the inherent qualities of the people themselves. They had become so accustomed to being led, so steeped in obedience to a higher authority, that they did not want individual freedom. The average German really loves the word *verboten* as much as he likes to be told exactly what to do. "The great error of the previous system of liberalism," Goering has said, "was to imagine that the people wanted to govern themselves, to lead themselves. No, the people want to be led and to be governed."

How different is the sentiment expressed by Shakespeare's Henry V—*unser* Shakespeare, as the Germans used to say:

"Every subject's duty is the King's, but every subject's soul is his own."

By nature and by long training, the true German is opposed in his heart to democracy, and at the best it may be said that in embracing republicanism he was merely making a doubtful experiment which he would be ready to abandon if it should prove to be unprofitable. Unfortunately for Germany and for the world, arrogant nationalism was not extinguished, but was only in hiding ; and militarism, muted and subdued, was already planning and plotting a hideous resurgence.

The Weimar Republic lasted fourteen years. It had withstood crisis after crisis : the attacks of Marxians and Royalists ; of Hitler and Ludendorff at Munich in their ineffective imitation of Mussolini's march on Rome ; the depreciation of the mark, which had brought with it industrial chaos and the ruin of the middle class. It had rid the Rhineland and the Ruhr of the foreign occupation and brought reparations within a reasonable compass. It deserved and might have commanded a better fate had it not been for the ineptitude of its leaders. It was born to meet trouble in those desperately troublous times, but a bolder spirit would have carried it through all the storms that blew in the wake of Germany's defeat and humiliation.

The Republic was thrice betrayed from within. First by those whose business it was to betray it : the Junkers and the militarists, reinforced by tens of thousands of officers home from the war, the Catholics, the crazy Nationalists, the business men and the profiteers of war and peace, who "cared for none of these things."

Secondly, by those whose business it should have been to support it—the Communists, who were fooled by Moscow. They preached revolution, but made no preparation for it. They awaited the signal for a world revolution and, futile and inactive, became a brake on the socialistic advance. That signal never came and never could come, for the simple reason that Moscow no longer cared about world revolution. It had ceased to be Communist, and was moving perceptibly towards Fascism and Nationalism. Bolshevism, after betraying democracy in Russia, betrayed it ■ Germany, and did its best to betray it everywhere else.

Thirdly, the Social-Democrats themselves betrayed the Republic by their own weakness. In fairness it must be said that they were the least blameworthy, for they alone made some kind of a struggle for the German experiment in democracy. By their effort such substantial reductions were made in the amount of reparations as finally to bring the total to a merely nominal sum. They gave Germany the standing

of a great Power by bringing her into the League of Nations, with a permanent seat in the Council. They had secured the withdrawal of foreign troops from the Rhineland, and Stresemann, before his death in 1929, had come near to ending the old bitter hostility between France and Germany.

Nevertheless, noteworthy as these achievements were, the Social-Democrats made two great blunders, both of which contributed heavily to the overthrow of the Republic.

The first of these was their failure to crush Prussian militarism and the Junkers who had made the war. If these and the other avowed exponents of nationalism and reaction had been barred for all time from participation in government and administration, the history of republicanism in Germany would have been very different. They should have been kept out of the army, out of the diplomatic corps, out of the civil service and the judiciary. Instead of this, at the very commencement of the new era, President Ebert lost his chance of a true Socialist revolution by his compromise with the army leaders. With the dread of Bolshevism before his eyes ; with the possibility of an army *coup d'état* always haunting him, Ebert—democrat, but no revolutionary—accepted their treacherous aid. When the Communists rebelled in 1919, he allowed General Kurt von Schleicher to persuade him to resort to the use of volunteers recruited from the old Imperial Army in order to crush the revolt. And he appointed General Wilhelm Groener, a reactionary militarist, to the post of Reichswehr Minister.

The result of this folly was soon apparent. There was a nationalist *putsch* before the Republic was many months old and its leader, Dr. Kapp, seized Berlin. The Reichswehr could not bring themselves to fight against their own comrades, many of their number, in fact, being involved in the *putsch*. Had there been a Republican Guard ready to serve the State irrespective of the political complexion of those who made the attack, the attempt to overthrow the constitution by force would never have been dared. As ■ was, failing an army which would do its duty impersonally, the Kapp rising was only put down by the calling of a general strike. The effect ■ this mishandling of the regular army was to place it in a position of political independence above the Republic, whose servant it should have been.

The second of the two initial errors of the democrats was in their failure to suppress the private armies that soon began to overrun Germany. Forced by the Treaty of Versailles to limit the standing army to a number sufficient only to keep order within the State, the unofficial armies might be regarded

as potential auxiliaries of the Reichswehr, enabling it to expand rapidly when the time should come to lift the oppressions ■ the Treaty. Even the Republicans wanted to see a great though free Germany reborn, taking her place amongst the nations. They wanted treaty revision almost as much as the Junkers and the big industrialists wanted it ; and they were equally susceptible to the humiliation of the foreign occupation of Germany. They strove valiantly against the impossible reparations demands of the Allies, and felt the odium of defeat, repression, lost territories and colonies as keenly as did the soldiers and the militarists. Maybe it would be truer to say that they placed the interests of the workers on the same level as the restoration of Germany's prestige and power, while the reactionaries thought nothing at all of the working classes ; only of Germany's might and military glory. The private armies had their uses, too, as a bulwark against Communism, which they had come to regard as an enemy as dangerous as any of the so-called patriots. But above all, the private armies enjoyed the active support and encouragement of the Reichswehr, over whom the Republic had short-sightedly omitted to retain complete control.

Ebert was guilty of miscalculating the risks of allowing these private armies of the patriotic societies and of the various dissimilar, ideological groups to parade and arm and to grow until, at a later stage, there were millions of men alongside the Reichswehr trained and equipped as soldiers. The *Stahlhelm*, or Steel Helmet Brigade, was formed at the beginning of 1919 by Franz Seldte, and the Iron Fist was organized by a group of ex-officers under Captain Roehm, the expressed aim of both of which was the resurrection of Germany's military power. The first of the political parties to initiate its own private army was the National-Socialist Party, and the Storm Troops and Black Guard were formed by Hitler in 1923. His bad example was soon followed by others, notably the Red Front Army of the Communists, until the Republicans, alarmed at their growth and power, were compelled to follow suit with the inauguration of their own armed force, the *Reichsbanner*.

With the exception of the last-named, all of these were openly hostile to the Republic. ■ they were what the Reichswehr leaders considered patriotic—by which was meant anti-socialist, anti-republican, pro-army and in favour of the employment of force to compel treaty revision—they were supplied with arms and funds by the Reichswehr out of money subscribed by the big industrialists. No army of the Communists or of the Social-Democrats could expect the counten-

ance of industry and the militarists, and the *Reichsbanner* stood alone, the target of the forces of both reaction and Communism.

The Storm Troops and Black Guard of Hitler flourished under the special favour of Captain Roehm, Reichswehr Commander of the Munich Garrison. When the reign of terror and murder caused by these violently contending factions became so great that their meetings were proscribed, only the party of Hitler, on the intercession of Roehm, succeeded in getting the ban lifted in their favour. It was Roehm who obtained the early support of capital for the Nazi Army and, when its fortunes were swaying in the balance, induced von Ribbentrop to canvas his influential friends and business associates on behalf of Hitler. Roehm, a brilliant soldier and a great organizer, sexual pervert and brutal murderer, personally supervised the training of the Storm Troops, fashioned them and made them into a formidable army.

The failure of Hitler at Munich, which earned him a term of imprisonment, was the only occasion on which he attempted to seize power by an actual resort to force. Murder whose object was the removal of political opponents, and brutal compulsion, were typical of the uses to which he put his army, but never open insurrection. But the armed diplomacy which he and von Ribbentrop employed in the bloodless conquests of Austria, Sudetenland and the rest of Czechoslovakia, had its foundations in his policy of always presenting political demands with the backing of his powerful Storm Troops long before he became Chancellor. He found in the comparatively early days of his struggle for power how much more effective an argument might be when half a million armed men stood closely behind him. Once he surrounded Berlin with them and made his demands. He did not intend to provoke an open conflict, but the power was present as an overwhelming reminder of the validity of his argument.

It was the same when, in March 1938, the German Army was ready on the Austrian frontier and three hundred aeroplanes blackened the sky, ensuring submission. And in September the same power persuasion caused England and France to yield before a show of armed strength.

If great nations like Britain and France gave way before such cogent reasoning, it is hardly surprising that the might of the private armies within the Reich hastened the fall of the Republic; rather was it not a matter for wonder that a regime so beleaguered by powerful enemies should have withstood their assaults so long. Had the Social-Democrats

realized early that force must be met by force, the Weimar Republic might well have weathered the storm.

Whatever the faults of the Socialists in Germany, the hardest words must be reserved for the extremists: the Communists on the one side and the violent nationalist reactionaries on the other.

The latter embraced a number of components of varying degrees of extremism, but all worked for the overthrow of democracy, the reconstitution of Germany as a great military power and reversion to autocracy in government. The Junkers, who were the big landowners of Prussia whose sons had formed the backbone of the Prussian Army officer class, sided naturally with the enemies of the Republic. Their interests lay in the exploitation of the labourers and peasants and in a return to the military glories of the Germany of Bismarck and the Kaiser.

Their vast lands were almost bankrupt by reason of their own neglect and mismanagement and they received large sums of money from the Exchequer through the Eastern Aid Fund, or *Osthilfe*: a fund which was established to develop agriculture in East Prussia and rescue their insolvent estates from ruin. A considerable proportion of the moneys from the fund was diverted from its proper uses, and large amounts were squandered by members of the Junker families on riotous living in the Spas of Germany and pleasure resorts of the Continent. The old President, Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, was himself a Junker, his estate at Neudeck having been presented to him on his eightieth birthday by the Junkers themselves, bought with money, so it was widely said, provided by the *Osthilfe*; and his son's name was closely connected with the scandal of the maladministration. Brüning, Chancellor in a Coalition of the Catholic Centre Party and the Social-Democrats, put forward in 1930 a scheme for internal colonization by settlement on these lands and at once there was an outcry from the landowners. President von Hindenburg, rather than face the disgrace of publicity, acceded to the demands of the Junkers and dismissed Brüning. He appointed in his stead Franz von Papen, an intriguing militarist who had been expelled from the moderate Centre Party on account of his underground conspiracies with the worst elements of reaction. Papen took office at the head of a group of avowed nationalists and militarists, whose voting strength in the popularly chosen Reichstag represented no more than one-ninth part of the electorate, with General Kurt von Schleicher, head of the Reichswehr, as Minister for

War. And this was done in a country with a democratic constitution!

The Junkers were the obvious allies of the militarists, the Reichswehr, the super-nationalists, the big industrialists, the armament makers and the profiteers. They cared no more for Hitler and his party of National-Socialists than did Hindenburg; but it was under their puppet Chancellor, von Papen, and the Junker-Militarist, von Hindenburg, that almost the last vestige of popular rule vanished from Germany. And a few months later, it was the intrigues of von Papen, with von Ribbentrop as the go-between, that gave Hitler his chance of power.

The only virtue that can be justly attributed to the militarists is their consistency. Even before the Peace Treaty was signed their plottings began, and not only did they continue without ceasing during the whole reign of the Republic; they have stamped their impress upon the wickedness which we know now by the name of Hitlerism.

Before 1914 Germany was a great military power, maintaining a great standing army whose officers took precedence of almost every class and profession. To be an officer in the army of the Kaiser was to command respect and adulation, and to them was accorded every privilege and honour. The little Reichswehr had no room for the hundreds of thousands of demobilized officers in 1919, although it absorbed an abnormally large number of them for its size. Even apart from the regular officers of the Imperial Army, many of these were young men who, after four years of war, had no other profession. They joined such organizations as the Iron Fist and the Steel Helmets, or patrolled the Russian and Polish frontiers in the *Frei-corps* and so nursed their militaristic longings. They hankered after the privileges the old Imperial Army had conferred and, nurtured on the theories of Treitschke and his school, dreamed of the predestined overlordship of the German race, of the conquests which were theirs to make as of right, and of the superiority of the fair-haired Aryans of which the German is the noblest expression.

The Reichswehr was the rallying centre for all those who believed that Might was Right and wanted to restore the supremacy ■ the army. They had recovered quickly from the stupor into which defeat in the field had drugged them, and the Kapp rising in 1920, instigated by the Reichswehr, proved that the spirit of Prussianism was by no means extinguished. Everywhere throughout Germany patriotic societies sprang into being, pledged to restore the greatness of

Germany by force of arms. Captain Roehm, ■ the Munich garrison, actively encouraged the formation of these semi-illicit bodies, sending his agents to their meetings to spy out the land and listen to the speeches of their orators, so that he might judge their fitness to receive support in money and arms. By these means the National-Socialist Party, then an obscure society with only a handful of followers, came under the notice of Roehm, and one of the agents he employed was none other than Corporal Adolf Hitler. Like the fools "who came to scoff" and "remained to pray," Hitler went to spy and stayed as a member.

It was easy to find the money to supply these societies and thereby influence and intensify hatred of the Republic amongst the people. Who but the makers of munitions, the war profiteers, the coal-owners and the leaders of the steel and iron industries would benefit most from German rearmament and the end of republican government? The Krupps, Thyssen, Stinnes and the coal king, Kirdorf, looked upon the Social-Democrats, with their pacifism and their policy of conciliation, as traitors, devoid of all sentiments of patriotism. It paid these magnates handsomely to subsidise reaction in every conceivable form in which it showed itself. The money they gave to establish and maintain the *Frei-corp*s and to finance the Reichswehr was repaid a thousandfold in the suppression of the revolt of Karl Liebknecht's Spartacists in January 1919 and of the workers' army in the Ruhr in the following year. Communism would mean their eclipse: the end of their wealth and power, whilst a Republic dedicated to idealism and conciliation would be quite as bad—for them.

In truth, the capitalists, the bankers and the millionaires of heavy industry supported Nationalism and raised the Communist bogey for the sake of their own pockets and power. They had been very much in evidence behind the scenes in preparing for the last war, urging, too, even during its continuance, the annexation of iron and coal lands in France, Belgium and Poland. They were not now going to allow the people to usurp the political supremacy which they themselves had so long wielded to their own great profit. They had used their power to inflame the minds of the Kaiser and his advisers with wild visions of conquest; and the war, although lost, had brought them fabulous wealth. Their factories and furnaces were engaged in little more than turning out goods to be used as payments in kind on account of reparations. What more natural than that they should seek to revive the *Drang nach Osten* of the Kaiser, for which complete rearmament —

cruisers, guns, aeroplanes and submarines—was essential? They saw in the Party of National-Socialism and the other nationally-minded societies the instruments which would set their machinery in motion again, and by subsidising them they paid a greater compliment to their own business acumen than to their humanity. "From 1920 till 1923 arch-capitalist Hugo Stinnes' money poured into the treasuries of the Fascist organizations, and particularly into that of the N.S.D.A.P. (National-Socialist German Workers' Party). Later, in 1925, [was Hugo Stinnes' sons and heirs who donated the money to convert the Nazi weekly paper, the *Völkische Beobachter*, into a daily]."<sup>2</sup>

To such men as these a peaceful Germany, with the profits of industry ensuring a greater margin of security and comfort for the worker and a middle-class contented and prosperous, were of little use, whereas a Europe in arms spelt prosperity for the shipyards, the iron foundries and the armaments trade.

As time went on, when it became manifest that Hitler was more National than Socialist; that he was wholly insincere in his electioneering and opportunist in his promises to the working classes; that he did not really care a row of pins for the Socialist side of his programme, finance came decisively to his aid. Fritz Thyssen backed him as soon as it became abundantly clear that it was in the interests of big business to do so. Von Ribbentrop did not start "running down the Ruhr" persuading his friends to come in on the winning side until 1929, when the tide was definitely setting in Hitler's favour. In time they saw in Hitler, shorn of his association with the more genuinely liberal-minded Gregor Strasser, a skilled demagogue, making a peculiar appeal to German pride, nationalism and sense of humiliation over defeat. What mattered was that Hitler passionately wanted a great army in order to retake the lost provinces and to carry out a perilous programme of ruthless expansion which, in the fulness of time, must inevitably lead to war and to prosperity for the makers of the engines of death and destruction.

One cannot blame the big business interests, the nationalists, the old Prussian militarists and the pan-Germans, any more than one can blame a wolf for being a wolf. The maker [armaments, who owes everything that he is to war and the equipment for war, cannot change his nature any more than the Ethiopian can change his skin. And only when the nations are at variance, each calling for a bigger expenditure [their

<sup>2</sup> Hans Behrend, *The Real Rulers of Germany*, p. 35.

wealth on tanks and big guns, can the great combines keep their plants fully employed. A long period of armed hostility repays the steel kings as well as, if not better than, open war but, unfortunately, when a nation prepares for war and talks war the forces which are thereby set in motion gather momentum and assuredly lead to it.

Germany rearmed openly for six years before September 1939. Consider for a moment what has been the total cost ■ her preparations for war during that time and add to it what must be spent by her in the present war for replacements of material and the accelerated production of arms. In 1937 Great Britain, feeling insecure in face of Germany's undisguised preparations for future aggression, replied with a programme involving an expenditure of fifteen hundred millions. But such a total pales before the amount Hitler's Government has sunk in military preparations since 1933. And until 1935, when von Ribbentrop scored his first great diplomatic success by negotiating the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, Germany was allowed no navy, no tanks and no warplanes. She had to rearm from zero to become the strongest military power in Europe in double-quick time. This she did by lowering the wage standard of the workers and of the middle-classes, enforcing a ten-hour day for labour and by robbery of the Jews and sequestration and devious finance. And while the Steel Trust and Krupps and the concerns of Haniel and Flick were counting their gains, they yet found time to instigate the war in Spain and to supply General Franco's army with materials for war. Every nation in Europe, great or small, must keep the pace, feeding the voracious war-mongers behind the scenes in Germany with orders for arms to man their own frontiers in fear of the growing menace of Germany. Is it any wonder that those far-seeing arms profiteers chose Hitler as their man?

The Communists played as great a part in undermining the Weimar Republic as the Nationalists, for they split asunder the progressive elements in the nation. Much more than the Socialists, the Nationalists and pan-Germans were their greatest enemies, but they could not see the wood for the trees. They were numerous enough to be a source of danger to the Government ; stupid enough to be a hindrance to it, comparing enviously the milk-and-water Socialism of the Social-Democrats with the misleading shop-window displays of Bolshevik Russia. The Liebknecht-Luxembourg rising at the beginning ■ 1919 was only the first of several of their attempts ■ seize power, but all were doomed to fail because the leaders

## VON RIBBENTROP IS STILL DANGEROUS

of the Reichswehr, whose political views made them reluctant to oppose a nationalist revolt, had no qualms when they were called upon to suppress similar violence in the Communists.

If all those who desired a genuinely democratic régime in Germany, with freedom and a fair share for all in the national wealth, had united in a common front, a solid, enduring structure might well have been erected, strong enough to resist the gathering tide of reaction. If the Communists had been sane and had joined with the Social-Democrats to establish firmly a real democracy in a semi-Liberal, semi-Socialist Government, Germany would have been saved the thralldom of National-Socialism. But, weakened by continual heresy hunts, they did little more than talk.

Besides the selfish chauvinism of the Junker-Militarists and arms magnates, the treachery and stupidity of the Communists and the follies of the Social-Democrats themselves, there were a variety of other internal forces at work in Germany piling up the odds against the survival of democracy. There was the rapid rise of the National-Socialist Party, the skilful development of the art of mendacious propaganda by Hitler and the shameless promises he made to gull the workers ; the brutal terrorism of the Storm Troops and the corrupt use of them at elections to stifle the free expression of the voters' will ; above all, the unhesitating resort to murder and violence to remove political opponents and to suppress dissident members of the Party.

There were the treacherous intrigues of the Catholic ex-Chancellor, Franz von Papen, which recovered for Hitler the support of big business, and of the scheming politicians who directed the Reichswehr ; and the treason of von Hindenburg, who violated his presidential oath whereby he had sworn to maintain the constitution of the Republic.

Amongst the early causes of disintegration were inflation and the depreciation of the mark following upon the adoption of a policy ■ passive resistance—instigated by Krupp's representative, Hugo Stinnes—to the occupation of the Ruhr. And earliest of all was the stigma that attached to the unlucky republican leaders because, by *force majeure*, they put their signatures to the Treaty of Versailles. Later on, the paralysis ■ industry consequent upon the world economic crisis brought a tremendous increase in the numbers of the unemployed and, fortuitously, a proportionate accession of strength to the Nazi Party, which professed ■ panacea to cure all ills. Then, when the fortunes of Hitler were yet none too secure, came the Reichstag fire plot, deliberately engineered by the Nazis ■

order to throw discredit upon the Communists and provide an excuse for their elimination from the political arena.

More germane to our inquiry than the foregoing, however, are the external causes of the catastrophic change from democracy to dictatorship in Germany. These, which rest upon the Treaty of Versailles and the insistence by the Allies upon fulfilment of its harshest clauses, forged a mighty weapon in the hands of Hitler for the discomfiture of the republicans, and provided the groundwork for the future foreign policy of ruthless expansion ■ the expense of small nations upon which Hitler and von Ribbentrop unashamedly embarked in 1938.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

**I**■ German eyes, the Treaty of Versailles is the fount of all the ills that afflict the nations of Europe to-day, and there ■ no escape for Britain, France and Belgium from a share of the blame for their too rigid insistence upon some of its more questionable provisions. Certainly it gave ample scope for the demagogic of Hitler to arouse in the German mind a feeling of oppression and of hatred for the victors who dictated it. Moreover, the demand for the removal of its territorial injustices and of the military disabilities it imposed upon Germany initiated a policy of adjustment by force which, once under way, could not be arrested by mere revision.

German dissatisfaction with the treaty centred mainly upon the economic clauses, the loss of territories in Europe and disarmament. Of these, perhaps the chief cause of the fall of German democracy and the rise of the Nazis was the burden of reparations.

Fixed at 6,600 million pounds in 1921, payment was to be spread over forty-two years at varying rates, the average being 157 millions per annum. Theoretically, this was not a penalty by way of indemnity, but rather compensation for the moral and material damage inflicted " upon the civilian population of the Allies and their property by aggression by Germany."

It may well be asked : were the reparations demands just ? Of course they were—but they were not wise. They forged the first link in a chain of events which led to the monstrous tyranny of Hitlerism, to the enslavement of Austria and Czechoslovakia, to the destruction of Poland, to the war and the Bolshevik assault on Finland.

It might have been better, as was suggested at the time, to fix payments in cash or in kind well within the capacity of a stricken Germany to pay ; to have allowed the Germans to rebuild the devastated areas themselves, as they were willing to do. But the French building trade and the Government would have none of such a plan, though French labour unions favoured it.

■ ■ possible that if there had been no reparations, German immaturity in democratic government, German militarism, pugnacity and will to power, might have travelled to the end of the same road. It is equally possible that but for reparations, German idealism, German liberalism or, as it was called, German social-democracy, might have led the nation along the path of European peace and prosperity. Nobody knows ; the reader is at liberty to form his own opinion from the sequence of events which followed the demand for reparations.

The Germans had to pay in foreign currency, e.g. in pounds, belgas and francs. After 1921 they did this by borrowing, but until then, no one would lend to them. The only other way to obtain pounds and francs was by selling more of their products to foreign countries than they bought : that is to say, by creating an export surplus.

They lowered their standard of life and dumped cheap exports into foreign countries, but not in sufficiently large quantities to get all the foreign currency they needed. There were other countries who were trying to realize an export surplus ; countries which were in more favourable circumstances than Germany. The United States, for example, was receiving huge sums on account of War Debts and endeavouring at the same time by means of high tariffs to keep out foreign goods. And German industrial organization was in no condition at the end of the war to beat all competitors. Furthermore, Germany had lost other sources of foreign currency—her mercantile marine and her foreign financial business. She failed to create the export surplus out of which to provide for reparations.

She had to buy pounds, francs, etc., with marks, to an extent much greater than that yielded by her exports. The result was a rise in the price of pounds and a fall in the external price of the mark. The mark continued to fall, and as the reparations payments were greater than Germany was prepared to meet from taxation or the proceeds of exports, the velocity of its fall increased.

For a time foreign speculators, believing that marks would recover, bought them and helped Germany to pay. But German speculators, who were in a better position to know what was happening, exploited the exchange position for their own private gain, sold marks and bought foreign currency and securities. And after a time foreign speculators got tired of buying marks, which accelerated their fall still more.

What could the German Government do ?

They could default, which would have brought immediate

Allied invasion, the fall of the Government, internal anarchy ; possibly civil war. They could try to raise the money by taxing their people more heavily : taxing them as the British were being taxed. But their position was not strong enough for this. They would have been succeeded by a Government of repudiation and the dreaded invasion would surely have followed. Besides, heavier taxation would have raised internal prices and increased manufacturing costs ; thereby reducing the export trade by which, at any rate, Germany was obtaining some foreign exchange to pay reparations. And taxation might have been followed by demands for an increase in the rate of payments to the Allies.

Germany was forced to print more marks—and more and more as the price of pounds and francs rose in terms of marks. By January 1923 the mark stood at 80,000 to the pound.

Germany fell behind with her payments and President Poincaré sent an army of occupation, partly composed of coloured troops, into the Ruhr, deeply offending the German people and provoking a passive resistance which still further reduced their capacity to pay. The mark became worthless, and with it went the savings and capital of the small business men and traders. The middle-classes were ruined and their sons provided excellent recruiting material for that army of bourgeois Bolsheviks which Roehm was about to raise for Hitler. And Hitler was provided with a platform to delude and hypnotize the masses.

The disastrous repercussions of German inflation produced a wave of sanity in Europe. Germany stabilized her currency and reparations were scaled down and brought into some kind of relation to the volume of trade.

But Germany had lost her working capital. She could only reconstruct her industry and pay reparations by having recourse to foreign loans, which were forthcoming now on a large scale. In particular, the United States, which had accumulated an immense surplus of gold, was willing to lend ; and from 1925 to 1928, Germany borrowed the equivalent of 750 million pounds : about half as much again as she paid in reparations.

Her industries were rationalized with the aid of the foreign money thus obtained, and she achieved an export surplus which enabled her for a time to meet reparations payments. Trade flourished and German capitalists built up an immense plant on the pattern ■ the huge American combines, capable of manufacturing by mass production for a permanent boom. But the efficiency of the new plant produced further unemploy-

ment, for ■ meant that more goods could be turned out with less labour. Trade was booming, too, in America, absorbing capital and causing American loans to contract, whilst interest rates rose. Germany was compelled to exist on short-term credits. Then came the great slump, which quickly spread to Europe. Frightened American investors recalled their money, markets contracted, prices fell, the standard of living was cut down and the whole bogus structure of German finance collapsed into ruin. The huge German plant stood half idle and Germany was faced with an immense army of discontented and half-starving unemployed.

The fall in prices had made the burden of reparations twice as heavy and the payments could not be met. A moratorium was declared, and for all practical purposes, that was the end of reparations. Even then--better still at an earlier stage--something might have been done to save the situation ; but delay, chiefly on the part of the French, in facing the hard economic facts squarely, prevented timely action to forestall the evil reaction to intransigence.

This, then, was the first of those straws that broke the camel's back, as the Reichstag fire was the last. All the rest—even taking into account the faults and errors of the German people, grievous as they were—followed simply, naturally and logically from the failure of the lately Allied Powers to recognize at each stage the wisdom of a more lenient attitude towards economically unsound payments of reparations. These were represented in Germany as a diabolically unjust tribute levied upon an innocent people. Out of their intractability emerged Hitler and the rest of the sorry crew of Nazism—Hugenberg, Papen, Rosenberg, Goering, Ribbentrop—and the policy of aggression culminating in the war on Poland. It must be realized that the demand for release from the burden of reparations was not the monopoly of Hitler and his party ; it was in the forefront of every party's programme and Brüning and Papen had disposed of them before ever the National-Socialists took control. But so violent had been Hitler's denunciations, so high had he raised the demand for the abolition of payments as a point of German honour, that it was more a triumph for Nazism when reparations were abandoned than for the presidential cabinet ■ Papen.

With the exception of Danzig and the Corridor, the outcry against reparations and unequal disarmament held the stage to the exclusion ■ the alleged territorial iniquities of the treaty for a long time after the Great War ; and for two quite simple reasons. First, territorial revision could not be com-

elled without rearmament; secondly, there could be no adequate rearmament until reparations were out of the way. From the earliest days, the apostles of extreme nationalism viewed Germany's task in well-defined stages: the annulment of reparations must precede rearmament which, in turn, would place Germany in a position to make demands for revision as an equal with the other Great Powers; and when revision was complete and the lost territories regained, Germany would be free to pursue her old dreams of world power.

There was but little real injustice to Germany in the territorial clauses of the Treaty. The return of Alsace and Lorraine to France was no more than an act of restitution, righting the wrong done to her by the Treaty of Paris in 1871, and Herr Hitler has himself publicly declared that Germany accepts the present Franco-German frontier. Nor could she quarrel with her treatment in those parts of Germany whose future was to be decided by plebiscites, except in the case of Upper Silesia, where the voting was overruled in Poland's favour, and Eupen Malmedy, where the plebiscite was improperly conducted. But so far as German territory was concerned, the separation of East Prussia from the rest of Germany by the Polish Corridor to the sea, and the isolation of the Free German City of Danzig in Polish territory caused profound resentment amongst the German people from the earliest days of the Republic.

Far greater alterations to the map of Europe were made by the Great War in the Austro-Hungarian Empire which, in 1914, ranked fifth amongst the Great Powers of Europe. Her population of fifty-two millions was composed of a variety of races—Czechs, Slavs, Magyars and Austro-Germans—loosely held together by ties of a common commercial interest in the great waterway of the Danube under the dual monarchy of the Hapsburgs. Before the war ended, this ramshackle empire fell to pieces. Hungary separated from Austria, the Republic of Czechoslovakia was set up in Prague and Poland declared her freedom. The Peace Treaties only perpetuated these natural racial divisions and defined the boundaries of the new independent States as nearly as possible in accordance with the principle of autonomy professed by its framers. Large areas of Austria-Hungary were detached and given to Italy, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, leaving the new Austria small and weak, with a population of only six and a half million, almost wholly German in character and language. Poland became free at the expense of Germany, Russia and Austria-Hungary after more than a century of subjection to alien races.

These changes were, in their main outlines, not inconsistent with the Fourteen Points enunciated by President Wilson on January 8th, 1918, and summarily rejected by the German Government. But ■ was inevitable—or at least human—that in the endeavour to delineate the frontiers of the new States, redress the grievances of old ones and reward allies, errors of judgment should creep ■ and other than purely racial considerations sometimes hold sway. Belatedly, on October 6th, Germany had declared her willingness to negotiate peace on the basis of the Fourteen Points, but this change ■ heart came only with the realization of defeat; whereas when she had contemptuously declined such a settlement only eight months earlier, the German commanders thought that the great offensives which they were preparing would end the war ■ their favour. In the meantime, millions of lives had been sacrificed by them in the belief that Germany would dictate the peace to the Allies; as she did in that same summer of 1918 dictate to Russia and Rumania the crushing terms of Brest-Litovsk and of Bucarest.

Besides the elementary right of self-determination, there were, in fact, other considerations which might quite justly be taken into account in framing the treaties, viz., economic needs and the security of the newly arranged frontiers. In the case of Poland, "free and secure access to the sea" was an economic necessity promised in the Fourteen Points, and the only really practical means of fulfilling the promise was by instituting the Corridor. To have given her an outlet into the Black Sea was scarcely practicable and would only have been a mockery of the undertaking. And, granted the liberation of the Polish nation, there was no sound reason why the geographical contiguity of the two parts of Germany should be considered of greater relative importance than free and secure access to the Baltic for Poland. Moreover, the population of the disputed area was predominantly Polish, except in Danzig, which was provided for by its incorporation as a Free City under the aegis of the League. Indeed, Germany's claim to Danzig and the Corridor—as is the case with most of the demands made by Hitler—can only be properly comprehended if, at the same time, the supposition of a greater right for Germans than for other peoples; the theory of racial inequality, with its corollary of the superiority of the German nation, ■ first accepted with all its implications.

Czechoslovakia presented an equal problem at the Peace Conference and, as with Poland in German Upper Silesia, she received rather more than her share, whilst Austria, com-

prising six and a half million Germans, was given less. From a position of precarious greatness as Hungary's predominant partner in the Hapsburg Empire, Austria was now so much reduced that her very existence as a separate State depended upon the goodwill of the League of Nations and the financial support of the Allies. She had become a Republic with a Social-Democratic Government in power; and, realizing the economic insufficiency which secession of the other parts of the old empire imposed upon her; bereft, too, of her non-German populations, she turned naturally to her former ally, Germany, with its counterpart of a Socialist Government under the democratic Weimar Constitution. Austrians, at first, wanted union with the Reich.

But the maintenance of an independent Austria was essential to the whole strategical conception of the new order in Europe, and the Allies could not therefore countenance an Anschluss with Germany. Help from the League and foreign loans for the rehabilitation of Austria were made conditional upon the abandonment of all attempts at an Anschluss and, in the course of time, as she became self-sufficient, the desire for union faded. Ably led and helped from outside in her finances; with a stable currency and industry reborn, great measures of housing and social reform were put in operation and Austria found her feet in a separate existence until the great slump shattered her credit. On the other hand, internal strife in Germany, the rise of the Nazi Party and the suppression of the Social-Democrats, brought about a change of feeling, so that when Hitler assumed power in 1933, two-thirds of the people of Austria were opposed to union with the Reich. But for the ambitions of Hitler, Nazi terrorism and interference and the defection of her protector, Signor Mussolini, the Republic of Austria would still stand as an obstacle to German aggression in Europe.

In marked contrast to the weakness of post-war Austria, Czechoslovakia emerged from the war as a strong economic unit, rich in material resources and with a frontier naturally adapted for defence against aggression by her neighbour, Germany. The definition of her boundaries at the Peace Conference, however, left room for the development of grievances by most of the surrounding States, particularly by Germany in regard to the Sudetenland. Here, protruding westwards in a salient reaching towards the heart of Germany to a point within two hundred miles of Berlin, were three and a half million Germans. What to do with this minority, whose land had belonged to the old Austria, presented a thorny problem to the peace-makers. It existed in small groups

within purely Czech-inhabited territory, completely separated from the new Austria, into which they could not be incorporated without injustice to the intervening Czechs. Nor had Germany any valid claim to absorb them, beyond the questionable plea that the mere haphazard existence of isolated bodies of her nationals on alien soil gives her a right to acquire territory that belongs to others. Mr. Harold Nicolson, who was a member of the Committee which drew up the Czechoslovakia frontiers, has stated that the old frontier was preserved because, first, the frontier "was a natural barrier which had existed for nearly a thousand years; and, secondly (and more importantly), that the livelihood of these Germans depended upon their communications with the rest of Czechoslovakia. They could not, to put it simply, take their goods westward across the mountains into Germany; it was essential for them to continue, as before, to send their goods eastward to Prague."<sup>1</sup>

For economic reasons, therefore, the final decision was a sound one, and from the point of view of strategy it was necessary to provide Czechoslovakia with a reasonably defensible frontier in reaching a settlement with a nation which had committed acts of aggression and had formulated and pursued the *Drang nach Osten*. But Hitler stole the thunder of the great democracies by championing the right of self-determination for a nation's exiles and applying it forcibly where Germans were concerned. There seems, however, to have been a difference between principle and practice, in that whilst democracy considered the application of the principle to be universal and endeavoured at Versailles to establish and uphold it in the case of small nations, the Nazi version of it denied independence to the weak and interpreted it only for the aggrandisement of the strong. Thus, from a pretended idealism of the liberation of minorities were evolved the successive pretexts for the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia and the partition of Poland. In other words, in order to build a greater Germany and add ten million Germans to the Third Reich, twenty-five millions of other nationalities were enslaved during the years 1938 and 1939.

German territory was also affected, though not taken away, by the provision for the demilitarization of the Rhineland, reaching from the frontiers of Belgium to Switzerland. In this zone, no military fortifications were to be permitted, and as Germany had lost the fortresses of Metz, Strasbourg and Thionville by cession to France, as well as the occupation of those within the zone, her effective military frontier became

<sup>1</sup> *Why Britain is at War*, p. 76.

the Rhine. This wise provision for the security of France and Belgium—and, incidentally, of Great Britain—although infinitely less burdensome than the proposal of Foch put forward by Clemenceau in a demand for a separate, independent Rhine State, ranked as yet another intolerable oppression of the German people. The gamble of its removal could not have succeeded if Hitler's bluff had been called by firm and united action on the part of France and Britain ; but the opportunity to check Hitlerism in almost its first violent outward manifestation was lost owing to fundamental differences in the attitudes of the statesmen of the two countries to the strict application ■ the Treaty. And opportunity knocked but once ; Hitler had scored his first big success. The method ■ Treaty revision by threat of armed conflict was established, conscription and rearmament followed and Germany might now secure her defences in the rear for the prosecution of the larger design which began with the overthrow of Austrian independence.

Not only every weapon of offensive warfare was forbidden Germany under the Treaty ; she was not even allowed to provide herself with anti-aircraft guns although, without fortifications in the east and in the west, her frontiers were indefensible. France and Belgium rightly required security, as security was also essential for the newly outlined boundaries in Central and Eastern Europe. But complete German disarmament, necessary at first, was not in contemplation at Versailles without all-round disarmament by the other Powers in Europe, and the bulk of the German people accepted military limitations for a time in the belief that no permanent inequality was intended. French fear of a Germany rearmed and vengeful and memories of two ruthless invasions ; Britain's reluctance to weaken her naval forces because ■ her need to protect her empire and her trade routes ; the emergence of militarism in Italy and the bellicose adventures of Japan in Manchuria, all combined to render nugatory the fine aspirations of even the most sincere advocates of disarmament. Despairing of fair and equal treatment, Germany began to rearm in secret from 1926 onwards. France's programme of armaments made her the greatest military Power in Europe, with Italy close on her heels ; Czechoslovakia and Poland built up their armies and became important military Powers on the borders ■ Germany ; Russia took her place as a potentially strong, offensive Power, while Britain disarmed partially, neglected to provide herself with a strong air force but retained a powerful navy.

German claims to equality were pressed by von Ribbentrop

■ the Disarmament Conference in 1932, at which each nation paid lip-service to the admirable principle expressed in the Covenant, which recognized "that the maintenance of the peace requires the reduction of national armaments to the lowest point consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations." None of them could agree, however, to forgo their own armour and, in the following year, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations, renounced the military restrictions of Versailles and commenced openly to rearm. Hitler introduced conscription into Germany ; and Britain, by negotiating with her the Naval Agreement of 1935, set the seal of recognition upon German rearment.

There were other clauses in the Versailles Treaty which aroused German anger and resentment, two of which must claim our attention, viz., the war guilt clause and the clauses under which Germany was deprived of her colonies.

Foolishly, we now believe, responsibility for the war was fastened upon Germany in an attempt to justify reparations. Article 23 affirmed that "Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her Allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her Allies."

Before the mists of Nazi propaganda obscured the view, there were few who doubted the truth of the assertion, but in a settlement which was to bring peace and harmony amongst the nations for all time, it was not prudent so to brand the wrongdoers. The Nazis made full use of the opportunity thus afforded them to incite the passions of national honour and resentment against Allied injustice and, never finical in a matter of a trifling inexactitude, misrepresented the wording of the clause as affirming the sole guilt of the Germans for the war. It became one ■ the most powerful weapons in the whole armoury of the National-Socialists : two-edged, to sharpen the sense of shame at a false accusation and to cut to pieces the villainous Treaty of Versailles.

The loss of the colonies offended German prestige more than ■ hurt her materially. For this reason the claim for restoration was kept in the background until recent years, and Herr Hitler has preferred to postpone the threat of action until the main item of his policy—the union of all Germans in Europe in one State—makes Germany strong enough to compel their return. It has been used as a bargaining counter by von Ribbentrop in

efforts to secure British co-operation with Germany and was emphasized repeatedly by him during his ambassadorship in London in order to tempt Britain into an alliance. The question, therefore, may more properly be dealt with in a subsequent chapter.

Enough has been said to apportion some of the responsibility for the birth of Hitlerism to the victorious nations who maintained the provisions of the Peace Treaties without subsequent reasonable revision. The terms were harsh, but not so harsh as a German peace might have been. They were dictated to Germany without affording her an opportunity for their discussion, only one concession—the plebiscite in Upper Silesia—being made. Even the reasonable plea, put forward by von Haniel, for reconsideration after a period of two years was rejected, and what was done in an atmosphere tense with the passions of a long and terrible war was allowed to stand uncorrected against all reason when men's feelings became less taut and strained in retrospect. Britain had fought for her own security and that of her empire, as well as for the ideal of an outraged Belgium. France had entered the war not only for security against Germany, but with the memory of her humiliation and suffering in the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian War. Italy had joined the Allies partly on the basis of territorial rewards in exchange for mercenary services, whilst Japan saw in it an opportunity for expansion. There are countless motives for modern war, yet it is true that most Englishmen fought for an ideal, Frenchmen for patriotic reasons and from fear of a greater Germany, some nations for liberation, others against naked aggression. In an age of hidden diplomacy, the balance of power and secret treaties, it could not be claimed that German and Austrian hands were spotless. After the defeat of Austria at Sadowa, a victory which established Prussian dominance in Central Europe, it is recorded that Bismarck said to Treitschke: "It must be confessed that our linen is not always of the cleanest." The blood of many nations stained it in 1914.

■ the Powers at Versailles treated German linen too harshly and caused it to shrink, there was full opportunity during the period in which Hitler was moulding post-war Germany into the shape of a Nazi monster for them to put into practice more of the idealism which was expressed in the Covenant, and for which the machinery of the League of Nations was provided. To have encouraged a democratic Germany, to have conceded reasonable demands before they were enforced by violation and to have shown magnanimity and recognized the

elementary truths of economics, might have ensured peace in Europe for many years to come. But French obduracy in face of a Germany resurgent, excused in part by bitter experience ; the weakness of British foreign policy, largely due to a commendable pacifism ; Italian disappointment at her war prizes and the interested aloofness of America, combined to render unity of view and purpose amongst the Great Powers unattainable.

Those opportunities for conciliation have passed beyond recall and Ribbentrop and his Führer have done wrongs which will be in our memories when the war is ended and the death of Hitlerism frees the German people. Versailles aimed to create security and establish a permanent peace in the world ; and a more timely understanding of the basic economic causes of war and aggression, of what underlies the crude demands for *Lebensraum* by nations which are not self-sufficient, might well have averted the present conflict.

Yet often, when in the speeches of Hitler and in the approaches of Ribbentrop Germany seemed to hold out the hand of friendship for Britain to grasp, her motives were suspect, the genuineness of their avowals unreal and their offers mere phantoms conjured up to isolate France. Too often during the last decade has Germany had her tongue in her cheek. The peace, then, if it be negotiated and not dictated, must be made across a conference table at which no chairs are set for such men as Hitler and Goebbels, or Rosenberg and Ribbentrop.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE INTRIGUES OF RIBBENTROP AND PAPEN WHICH PLACED HITLER IN POWER

WHEN Gustav Stresemann was Foreign Minister of Germany in 1923, the disastrous policy of resistance to the more oppressive clauses of the Versailles Treaty was soon abandoned. So serious had been the effect of that policy that Germany was compelled to appeal to the Powers for help and submitted to supervision of her finances. There ensued a period in which co-operation with the victors and conciliation led to a great revival in German trade.

In 1924 the Dawes Plan provided for a settlement of reparations based upon the national income of Germany, payments to be made partly in kind. Loans for the reconstruction of her industries were forthcoming from America and, to a smaller extent, from Britain. Prosperity gradually returned whilst unemployment diminished. In 1926 the Locarno Pacts were signed, and as the first-fruits of the new understanding, Germany entered the League of Nations.

For some years the prospects of a closer approach of Germany to the other nations of Europe seemed assured. Germans threw themselves with a will into the task of modernizing and rebuilding their industries; great sacrifices were made and the workers submitted to longer hours of work. As a consequence, the National-Socialist Party could make but little progress, for their recruits were drawn from the workless and the dissatisfied. The people were too busy to pay heed to the harangues of Hitler about oppression and the tyranny of the Treaty.

At the elections for the Reichstag in 1928 the Party polled 800,000 votes, giving them only twelve seats. But in the following years the first chill blasts of the world financial crisis reached Europe, Austria was shaken by the suspension of the Viennese *Credit Anstalt*, a financial disaster which produced repercussions of a most serious kind in Germany, causing the banks to close their doors. American money was no longer available and loans were called in. All the apparent

prosperity of the nations had been built up on the basis of credit, and the sudden slump in America brought about the collapse of the whole precarious system.

The war had left the countries of Europe heavily in debt to the United States, Great Britain to a larger extent than any other. They had put all their efforts and resources into the production of armaments during four years of intense struggle ; hundreds of towns and villages in France and Belgium and other parts of Europe had been utterly destroyed. They came out of the war spent and impoverished, yet there were huge interest payments and redemption charges to meet and, for Germany, an immense burden of reparations. In order to be able ■ pay and to import raw materials for their manufactures, they must sell goods abroad ; but no country on the continent of Europe could afford to buy those goods.

The simplest remedy seemed to be to fix high tariffs on all imported goods, to grant subsidies to help exports and to employ every known device for underselling the foreigner in his home market. But all the nations adopted the same remedies, and the new States which had sprung into being out of the Peace Treaties erected their own tariff walls and concentrated on increased production. To make matters worse, the United States, glutted with the world's gold, raised her import duties. The net result was that each country was producing enormous quantities of goods for export for which she could not find a market, and was too much impoverished to buy the products of her neighbours.

In the first period after the war Czechoslovakia, incorporating the best industrial districts of pre-war Austria, had quickly recovered and even poor Austria, with foreign finance helping her, seemed to be capable of achieving an independent economic existence. In Germany, so long as American and British money poured in at a greater rate than reparation payments went out, a sham prosperity reigned.

Great Britain's stupendous war effort had entailed the loss of her premier position in the world of finance. She owed immense sums to America and relied upon payment of reparations by Germany and redemption of loans made to her Allies to provide the money needed for her war debts. The failure of these sources of wealth brought her nearer to bankruptcy than she had ever been. Her market for cotton goods in India had shrunk to small dimensions, a huge part ■ her shipping was laid up for lack of freight and the whole world was too poor to trade with her. A National Government took control, Britain went off the gold standard and narrowly averted a crash.

Not only were the nations too poor to buy; prices had fallen by half, so that in order to realize a given export profit, it was necessary to sell twice as much. In 1931, President Hoover declared a moratorium on all payments for one year.

The world slowly resigned itself to harder work and a much lower standard of living. An international loan for rehabilitation was made to Germany, but the crisis had exposed the weakness of her finances. And the number of unemployed reached the colossal figure of six millions. The economic blizzard had been an ill-wind, but it blew great accessions of strength to both Hitler and the Communists. The greater the discontent and sufferings of the masses, the more ready were they to accept at their face value the promises of Hitler to lead them out of the morass into which the futilities of the Social-Democrats and the wickedness of the Versailles Powers had brought them. They believed what he told them: that all their troubles sprang from the iniquitous Treaty and the ineptitude of the Social-Democrats in not forcing revision. The whole world economic crisis, it was shown, had its foundation in the wrongs of the Treaty, in reparations and the loss of Germany's iron ore and coal mines. German honour was stained by the reproach of the war guilt clause, and the pleasing theory of her innocence in face of Allied aggression proved to be readily assimilable by the gullible masses of the people. The national pride was rehabilitated by urging the abrogation of the disarmament clauses; Germany must be free to defend her frontiers against the encroachments of envious and vindictive neighbours. Racial science was called into play, stirring up popular hatred of the Jew and the foreigner; and the palatable doctrine of German superiority went down equally well. Hitler poured scorn on the Social-Democrats and the Republicans who, by their revolution, had "stabbed Germany in the back" in 1918, betrayed an undefeated army into surrender, and then had signed a treaty whose intention was to keep Germany in subjection for ever.

The appeal was irresistible to a people who were suffering the material consequences of a lost war of imperialism, a people who had hitherto believed that their former rulers had led them into an unjust war and a shameful defeat. There was a Utopian side to Hitler's programme, too. Industry and the banks were to be nationalized, usurers suppressed and the slavery interest to be abolished. And for the capitalists there was the fear of Bolshevism—for as the followers of National-Socialism increased in numbers, so did the Com-

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unist Party gain adherents. Interference with the rights of the great landowners did not please the Junkers, but the support of big business more than compensated for their enmity, and von Ribbentrop found it an easy task to persuade the latter to back Hitler against the spectre of Communism. It was this fear that weighed most decisively with Ribbentrop himself rather than any profound belief in many of the other items of the Party programme. For him it was at first a choice between two evils : Hitler or Communism, and it was in that light that he represented it to the industrialists of the Ruhr. The idea of Hitler as Chancellor did not appeal ■ them at all, but few people at that time regarded him as a serious aspirant for power. His nationalism and his hatred of the Republic they approved, and they knew only too well what would happen to their businesses and their mines and factories under a dictatorship of the proletariat. So they subscribed their money freely in order to combat Bolshevism ; not to put Hitler in power.

In this Ribbentrop proved so useful that Hitler made him chief organizer of the Party funds. He was as successful as a tout for Hitler as he had been in the rôle of commercial traveller in champagne. And not only that ; his membership of the *Herrenklub* brought him into contact with the old aristocracy of Germany, people with great influence in nationalist and military circles. The *Herrenklub* was a hotbed of reactionary intrigue whose members looked down their long, aristocratic noses at the vulgar Bavarian corporal. In their eyes, he was not even a German and, quite as distasteful to them, he had been only a non-commissioned officer in the army. His methods of violence revolted them and his programme seemed to promise too much to the workers. They would rather have a member of their own hierarchy as Chancellor, or one of the generals. Ribbentrop had need of all his tact and persuasive charm to champion the cause of the Nazi upstart within those lordly walls, but he made converts there, none the less.

There was another service the Ribbentrops performed for Hitler, one which was to be of inestimable value to him in his contacts with his social superiors. They groomed him, taught him his table manners and the rudiments of behaviour in polite society. In spite of his uncouthness, his rather unprepossessing appearance and shoddy mode of dress, Frau von Ribbentrop saw the possibilities of Hitler sooner than her husband did, and took him in hand. His father had died when Adolf was but fourteen years of age, and had been only a

minor Customs official at Braunau in Austria, so that the boy had had no opportunity to acquire knowledge of the manners and usages of people of position. He had lived in a home for destitute men in Vienna, hawked picture post cards in the streets, worked as a decorator and house painter, and had frequented the beer halls trying to sell his pictures. Then in the army he had risen no higher than the rank of corporal. After the war his political career began and developed in the pot-houses of Munich, where he found the little circle of politicians from whom sprang the German Workers Party. He was still ill-at-ease in company when he made his first appearance at the Ribbentrop house at Dahlem, boorish in his talk, hesitant between too great obsequiousness and an overbearing omniscience. But he proved an apt pupil and responded quickly to the good-natured tutelage of Frau von Ribbentrop.

By the time Heinrich Brüning became Chancellor, Ribbentrop was heart and soul with Hitler in his demand for revision at any price. In 1930, world depression was reaching its climax and affairs were going from bad to worse in Germany. The elections which followed Brüning's appointment upset the balance of parties in the Reichstag, both the National-Socialists and the Communists being now able to make their voting strength felt. Brüning, a Catholic Trade Unionist, was Chancellor with the support of a coalition of the Social-Democrats with the Catholic Centre Party, but the great increase in the numbers of Nazis and Communists made it almost impossible for him to obtain a working majority to carry the reforms he proposed, or even to govern. Against an adverse vote in which the Conservative Nationalists joined, the coalition was powerless. Moreover, his policy of deflation bore heavily upon the working classes and deprived him of the consistent support of his Social-Democrat allies. The difficulties of government in a house so divided soon became too great for him.

In a chaotic Reichstag, there seemed to Chancellor Brüning to be no other way out of the impasse than to fall back upon Article 48 of the Constitution. He had the ear of the President, who was too old, too little enamoured of democratic institutions and too unaccustomed to them to do other than acquiesce. Probably the situation in Germany at that time was something quite different from the "state of grave danger" which those who drafted the Constitution contemplated, but von Hindenburg declared that such a state had arisen. Article 48 empowered the President to issue Emergency Decrees when the Constitution was endangered, and thenceforth he and Brüning

ruled Germany by decrees, valid with Hindenburg's signature, for nearly two years.

Devout, democratic Heinrich Brüning had no idea that in adopting this arbitrary mode of government he was opening wide the door to reaction and establishing, by inadvertence, a vicious precedent which would soon be exploited to perpetuate an authoritarian dictatorship of a group at the will of the President. That, however, was the practical outcome ■ his two years' rule. And as for Hindenburg, he was well over eighty years of age and was, when all is said and done, primarily a soldier, a militarist and a Prussian landowner ; anything, in fact, but a republican.

But stranger than the blindness of Brüning and the unconstitutionalism of von Hindenburg was the meek submission of the parties in the Reichstag. At any time a majority had power to force a dissolution, which must have been followed by an election within a scheduled time. They did not realize that by their passive assent in government by methods which contravened the spirit, if not the letter, of the Constitution, they were aiding and abetting in the demise of the Republic.

Hitler was determined to take power by strictly legal means : that is, through the votes of the people—aided, of course, by the terrorist outrages of his army of Brown Shirts. During Brüning's tenure of office, his following increased so rapidly that in 1931 it seemed that nothing could keep him out of office after the next elections. Brüning was strongly opposed to his reactionary policy and his methods of violence, and was courageous enough to ban the Storm Troops, forbidding them the streets of Berlin, until von Papen restored their privileges. But Hitler had command of unlimited supplies of money from the capitalists with which to exploit the miseries ■ the vast army of six million unemployed and win new adherents. At Bad Harzberg in the autumn, an alliance between him and Hugenberg, who held the purse strings, had been formed, uniting the Nationalists with the National-Socialists in a common front against Brüning, against his mild version of Socialism and against the Republic. The Chancellor's position became precarious with such powerful forces arrayed against him, but he still retained the confidence of the President.

From covert support of Nazism, von Ribbentrop's attitude was now that of an ardent enthusiast. He was a leader in the Storm Troops, and from the Henkell offices he was actively engaged in organizing the *Büro-Ribbentrop* in preparation for the day when the National-Socialists would assume power.

Even in the *Herrenklub*, so greatly had Hitler's prospects changed, he could openly champion the cause of the Nazis where before the name of Hitler might only be spoken in a whisper. And soon, with the wily Papen, he was to play a vital part in the intrigues which brought Hitler to office and gave Germany a dictator.

The Brüning period was marked by the failure of the Versailles Powers to reach a better understanding with Germany in regard to two questions of vital importance to her, viz. reparations and the proposed Customs Union with Austria. In the case of reparations, the depression had so affected Germany's economic structure that, as Dr. Brüning bluntly declared, "Germany, by reason of her financial crisis, can no longer pay reparations and she will not." At the London Conference held early in 1932, French obduracy prevented recognition of an obvious act of necessary revision. Similarly, the proposal for economic union with Germany, prematurely made by Austria, was rejected by France, although the United States, Great Britain, Belgium and Holland supported it. The effect of these failures to meet the reasonable demands of German statesmen when the depression had made international co-operation essential, gave added point to the Nazi allegations against the Powers of injustice and intolerance in their determination to resist treaty concessions, and strengthened the growing opposition to Brüning. If both the Austrians and the Germans desired union—even political union—to sanction it would only have been in accordance with the principles professed by the Versailles Powers; principles for which we are fighting again now, and might have gone a long way towards conciliating moderate opinion in Germany. Consent might even have meant union with a nation ruled by reason, instead of forcible annexation by the Nazi-ridden Germany into which Hitler, aided by the stubborn and unyielding attitude of France, has transformed her. Current happenings, however, render these surmises more speculative than they appeared to be two years ago, before the entry into Prague.

The occasion for the Chancellor's dismissal came with his plans for land settlement in East Prussia, involving proposals which aroused the bitter hostility of the Junkers. They described the scheme as a species of agrarian Bolshevism which, if brought into operation, would be the precursor of all kinds of Communist inroads into the preserves of capital, the nationalization of banks and key industries and State interference in business. Fearful of the loss of their privilege of exploiting the peasants and labourers, they made common

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cause with the Conservatives and the National-Socialists and, helped by the scandal of the *Osthilfe*, they put pressure on the President. Himself a Junker and filled with apprehension at the consequences of an inquiry into the scandal, he dismissed Brüning, and his son's complicity in the maladministration of the fund was hushed up for the time being.

Brüning had fought hard to save Germany from the Nazis and had done much to raise his country to equal status with the Great Powers. At Geneva in May 1932, he secured the virtual cancellation of reparations and the tentative agreement of England, Italy and the United States to an increase in the standing army and the provision of substantial trained reserves. This approval by the three Great Powers—rejected by France—was equivalent to an acknowledgment of Germany's right to re-arm.

During his absence at Geneva, von Papen was busily plotting against him. France, fearful of a revival of the old hostility of her once powerful enemy, delayed ratification, and when Brüning returned to Germany, Hindenburg had already made up his mind to dismiss him and make Papen Chancellor instead. Papen had struck a bargain with the Nazis, who promised their support in the Reichstag in return for the immediate removal of the ban on the Storm Troops and an undertaking to test the feeling of the country in an election.

The selection of von Papen came as a surprise, for from the earliest days of the Weimar Republic, the President had always acted constitutionally in choosing his Chancellor from the party which could command the largest following in the Reichstag. Papen was a comparatively unknown aristocrat, the nominee of the Reichswehr Minister, General Kurt von Schleicher. Hitler was not acceptable to the army leaders or to the "Palace Clique" of von Hindenburg, whatever the strength of his party might be, and Schleicher, with the army behind him, was all-powerful. The Reichstag, having surrendered its powers to the President, had virtually no say in the matter. Actually, the electoral strength of the Nationalist clique which supported Papen was greatly inferior in numbers to the Nazis, and he could not hope to conduct the affairs of the nation—he were to be dependent upon the votes of the deputies. Nevertheless, what was done under Brüning could also be done under Papen by continuing the resort to Emergency Decrees under Article 48—a situation which a too compliant Reichstag had now little power to alter.

Papen at once announced the formation of a Presidential Cabinet and incorporated in it the most rabid national and

reactionary elements in Germany to the exclusion ■ Hitler and his party ; this with the full support of Hindenburg, who disliked the Nazi firebrand as much for being a demagogue and an ex-corporal as for his employment of murder politics and his dangerous doctrines. His programme, too, had not yet been freed ■ certain semi-Socialist schemes retained with the object of deluding the working classes ; promises which must have been wholly obnoxious to the landowners and nationalists.

The new Cabinet, of which Schleicher as the political representative of the Reichswehr was the real head, intended to rule for four years at least ; with the Reichstag, if it meekly obeyed orders ; without it, and by Presidential decree, ■ it rebelled. The elections for a new Reichstag were fixed for July 31st, but meantime, the autocratic intentions of the Cabinet became fully exposed by the dismissal by von Papen of Carl Severing, the Socialist Chancellor of Prussia, and the ministers and officials of the Prussian Social-Democratic State. Every important post in the Government and administration of Prussia was filled forthwith by reactionary adherents of the Presidential Cabinet on the pretext that those responsible for keeping order had failed in their duty and endangered the maintenance of peace. This rape of Prussia, as ■ ■ called, was the final blow to democracy in Germany.

Papen scored one outstanding success early in his tenure of office—the agreement reached at Lausanne whereby reparations were, to all intents and purposes, wiped out and Germany regained control of her railways and the Reichsbank, which had been in hostage to the Treaty Powers against performance of the reparations obligations. But great as this achievement was, it did no more than complete the work of Brüning earlier in the year. It brought little kudos to Papen, however, for the Nazis professed disappointment at the results and represented the agreement as a failure, in that other outstanding demands—the right to equality of defence armament and the removal of the stigma of the war-guilt clause—had not been insisted upon and obtained. They used these grievances with telling effect at the July elections to discredit the Cabinet, exploiting to the full the slur upon German honour which responsibility for the war entailed, and the feeling ■ oppression that unilateral disarmament represented.

He met with a serious reverse at the elections and the National-Socialist vote increased. Hitler's followers obtained 230 seats in the new Reichstag, and in the Presidential elections in the previous March and April he had already polled heavily

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in opposition to the almost deified candidature of von Hindenburg. Now, after ten years of struggle, power seemed to be within his grasp. His was the largest party in the Reichstag and no constitutional government could carry on without him. Either his party must be suppressed at the cost of grave disorders or civil war within the Reich, or the Schleicher-Papen Party must come to terms with him. They tried to compromise and, failing in that, they outwitted him. He was received by Hindenburg, who treated him with contempt and refused his demands. He could have a subordinate place in the Cabinet but could not be trusted with power.

The Reichstag was dissolved by the Chancellor almost as soon as it met, and he continued to govern by means of emergency decrees without a vestige of legal authority. Superficially, the Constitution was still in force, however rent and tattered by the irregularities of the Cabinet and, before it, of Brüning. The dissolution of the Reichstag necessitated another election, and this took place on November 6th. The Presidential coterie, although defeated at the polls again, derived consolation from the fact that Hitler, too, suffered a substantial reduction in the number of National-Socialists elected. With 197 deputies, his party was still able to bring all semblance of parliamentary rule by majority to a standstill, but the Cabinet of Prussians and militarists clung tenaciously to power and refused to hand over the reins exclusively to him. There could be no possibility of compromise with him, determined as he was to rule alone as Dictator. Yet this travesty of democratic government could not long be allowed to continue; means must be devised to steal Hitler's Party from him and, short of bloodshed or a *coup de main*, make an end of his power. Papen tried these tactics by putting part of the Nazi programme into operation, but without the results he expected.

Within a few days of meeting, the new Reichstag was dissolved by Papen before the deputies could register their disapproval of the Cabinet which, under Article 54 of the Constitution, must have their confidence.

Hitler and Goering were almost beside themselves with fury and mortification at being tricked out of office by a ruse which denied them a vote of the Reichstag. There ensued a period of terrorism and wholesale murders committed by the Storm Troops until a Presidential decree was issued reimposing the penalty of death—abolished at Weimar—for political murder. The Nazi Party was riven by internal dissensions, the rabid nationalist partisans discontented at the

failure of their leaders to secure office, whilst the Strasser brothers entered into negotiations with von Schleicher, who was himself a Socialist, for a breakaway of the Left Section of the Party from Hitler. Finances were at their lowest ebb ; the industrialists, frightened by Hitler's demands and by the rowdyism of his Storm Troopers, were withholding their contributions, and the strain of numerous elections had depleted the Party funds so seriously that ■ was in danger ■ breaking up.

Alfred Hugenberg, the Nationalist news and film proprietor, holding the purse of the armament and industrial magnates, withdrew the subsidies of capital from the Storm Troops. He had once sworn alliance with Hitler at Bad Harzburg, but had gone over to the Party of Papen and the President. Now he used his powerful newspapers to oppose him, and the idea of Hitler ever becoming Chancellor with an authoritative Cabinet filled him with the keenest apprehensions. Already Schleicher had offered Hitler the post as a bribe in a new coalition which would, however, leave him in a minority in the Cabinet, and he had refused it. It was all or nothing for him. His party was still so strong that no government could live for long without his support, and knowing that time was on his side and wanting sole power for himself without the fetters of a patched coalition, he bided his time.

Papen and Schleicher might have continued in office without a Reichstag majority so long as the President was willing to sign decrees and so long as Hitler did not use his army to oust them. He was determined, however, to have the Chancellorship without resort to force, and to have it on his own terms. He would be no shadow Chancellor, carrying out the policy of Hindenburg through the medium of a Papen or Schleicher Cabinet, and there was yet another weapon in his armoury as persuasive as a civil war. On the eve of the November elections he supported the Communists in a traffic strike in Berlin and even threatened a general strike. For three days Berlin was paralysed. The Storm Troops stood ready armed, not to fight, but as a visible symbol of Hitler's power.

Although the Nazi vote decreased, the election brought no solace to the Cabinet, for the parties of the Left returned stronger than before, and with Schleicher deserting him, Papen's days as Chancellor were numbered. Schleicher was endeavouring to manoeuvre Hitler into a coalition, but with no more success than Papen had achieved.

Hindenburg dismissed Papen and appointed Kurt von Schleicher Chancellor in his place. But any appointment

which did not take account of Hitler could only perpetuate the impasse. With a party whose votes, even after the reverse of the November elections, were in the region of twelve millions, Hitler could not be passed over. The deadlock had continued too long, and if [redacted] were allowed to persist, [redacted] would lead to still more serious disorders, perhaps internal war and an attempt by the Communists to seize power. Discontent throughout the Reich was growing, unemployment figures still rising, Communist riots and clashes in the streets between rival factions and parties were attracting the unwelcome attention of foreign observers. If serious losses in foreign trade, and strife and bloodshed, were to be avoided, Hitler must be placated with a share in the Government at all costs.

On the one hand, there was Hitler demanding unfettered power; on the other, Hindenburg, with Hugenberg representing the ultra-Nationalists and Schleicher the army. The latter wanted an autocratic Cabinet, not dependent upon a majority of the Reichstag. They recognized the value of that part of the Nazi programme which furthered their own national ambitions, and were now more than willing to include the Leader in a new "patriotic" Government. But they could not tempt him with anything less than full power, nor could they withstand the pressure of so great a National-Socialist vote. Whoever held office as Reichs Chancellor must have Hitler with him or fail.

And the Socialist Schleicher was far from proving a success as Chancellor. He revived Brüning's land settlement schemes, hoping thereby to gain wide popular support, but only succeeded in alienating the Junkers and incurring the displeasure of the President. Papen was coming back into favour with Hindenburg and was daily in close converse with him.

If Schleicher was worried and losing ground, however, so also was the Nazi Party. Serious internal dissensions had robbed them of the financial support of the wealthiest of their capitalist backers, and they were woefully short of funds, in debt for election expenses to the extent of millions of marks. Gregor Strasser was threatening defection, conspiring with Schleicher to take over to him the powerful Socialist elements of the Party, which represented more than a third of their whole strength. One section blamed its leaders for not seizing power by force; another for not taking the smaller share of office that had been offered to them.

Strasser was in close touch with the leaders of the Social-Democrats and the Trade Unions. With Hindenburg's benediction, Schleicher offered him the post of Vice-Chancellor

in a newly assorted Government, but when Strasser sought the consent of Hitler he met with a curt refusal. Hitler was afraid that acceptance of the post by his colleague would so strengthen the latter's hold upon the Party that his own leadership would be in danger.

On December 6th, 1932, Strasser officially severed his connection with the Party. Soon afterwards, in collusion with Papen, he made public a list of nominees in a proposed new Cabinet in which he himself was named as Chancellor.

Deprived of their subsidies and insolvent ; with the President and every party against them, and rent in twain by internal quarrels, the Nazi leaders were in despair. There seemed to be no hope of saving the Party from disruption, or of bringing Hitler to power. Strasser must be found and either cajoled or intimidated into abandoning his plan. In a mood of the blackest despondency, Hitler repeatedly threatened suicide. If the Nazis could not assert their rights now he would not live to see another group in office.

Von Ribbentrop sought out the renegade and persuaded him to leave Berlin. Taking his family with him, Strasser retired to Italy and with him went the danger of disunion and the chance of a Strasser-Schleicher-Papen Government. What arguments Ribbentrop used ; what bribe he offered or what dire threats he employed, only he now knows, for Strasser and von Schleicher paid with their lives in the blood-bath of June 30th, 1934. But the news he brought back from the interview with Strasser recalled Hitler from his mental gloom, and hope revived as if by magic.

There still remained the fear that the intrigues of Papen, now fully restored to the favour of the President, would take a new direction and that he would try to usurp the power the Nazis claimed. Again the smiling, smooth-tongued Joachim, close friend of von Papen, was called in to their aid.

In the *Herrenklub* he reminded Papen that when Brüning fell, he had only been helped into the Chancellor's shoes by the promise of National-Socialist support ; and that because he had not been true to his bargain with them, he must implicitly understand that any Government at which he connived that did not include Hitler, would have to reckon with their determined hostility. Papen knew that, even with the President's support, he could not stand without their help now that Strasser's scheme had failed, so Ribbentrop scored again for Hitler.

But their talk had given a new twist to the workings of von Papen's crooked mind. The Nazi Party was easily the

strongest of all the parties in Germany. National-Socialism was the only real bulwark against Communism—that nightmare of the Nationalists, the industrialists and the Junkers—and it was becoming clear even to the aged President that there were only two alternatives for the nation: Bolshevism or full-blooded Nazism, with all power in Hitler's hands. A break-up of the Party was as great a menace to industry and the Nationalists as it was to Hitler. And unless means were quickly found to satisfy him, disintegration was inevitable, involving as it would the withdrawal of the only sure shield against anarchy.

The solution of the problem was as characteristic of the sinuous mind of Papen, ex-spy and saboteur, as it was of Ribbentrop, "the champagne diplomat," who had prepared the ground. Papen was now without a party, as well as out of office. Ribbentrop had convinced him that, single-handed or in alliance with any other combination of parties, he could not hope to take part in any stable reconstruction without due recognition of Hitler's claims. Whatever alignment of parties or interests there might be, it must be based primarily upon the supremacy of the Nazis, and the President must be brought into line.

The contact Ribbentrop had made with Papen in his sabotage days in America had been renewed at Constantinople, when they were both attached to the German Military Mission to Turkey. Papen, moreover, considered himself under an obligation to Ribbentrop for services rendered in helping him to evade capture at the hands of the British in Jerusalem, and frequent meetings had taken place between the two at that exclusive haunt of the aristocracy in Berlin, the *Herrenklub*. Papen had sponsored Ribbentrop's introduction to the club, when the ennobling *von* had been added to his name and entitled him to membership.

Hitler and Papen were at cross purposes because ■ the trick played on the Nazis in the Reichstag when, at the last moment, the latter had produced the President's decree of dissolution nullifying the adverse vote of the deputies. Goering was unapproachable, for it was he who, as President of the Reichstag, had then been outmanoeuvred. And the failure to allot posts in the administration of Prussia to Nazis could not be forgotten. Hugenberg, too, the man who had withdrawn the financial support of the capitalists, reducing the Storm Troops to such a pass that many had been obliged to beg in the streets of Berlin, was at arm's length from Hitler. But Papen knew of the close friendship which now existed between

Ribbentrop and the Nazi leader and decided to make use of it. He had no other means of approach. What he really wanted was office, whatever party might be ■ power ; and having been dismissed the Chancellorship in a Government dependent upon the Reichswehr and the President ; expelled, too, from the Centre Party, he turned to the National-Socialist whose enemy he had been. He imagined that he could make use of Hitler and, having inveigled him into office in a coalition, gag him and keep the power in the hands of himself, Hugenberg and the President. But every appeal he made to Nazi headquarters remained unanswered ; Hitler, Goebbels and Goering ignored him. The discussion with Ribbentrop altered everything and gave him his chance. Through him alone he could reach his goal.

The choice of Ribbentrop as an intermediary was particularly fortunate, for besides being a close friend and in the confidence of Hitler, he was the very man for an intrigue which would require tact and great power of persuasion. He was *persona grata* with the chiefs of industry, Hugenberg amongst them, as well as with the political wire-pullers in the *Herrenklub*.

Papen's scheme was to unite the Nationalists of Hugenberg with the National-Socialists of Hitler : a combination which would be assured of a majority in the Reichstag, thereby establishing a strong and stable reactionary régime under the thumb of the President. For himself, Papen would be content with the post of vice-Chancellor under Hitler and, being again in the good graces of the President, he expected to have almost as much influence in the new cabinet as Hitler himself would have as Chancellor. He did not dream of making a present of full authority to Hitler, nor would he represent the proposed bargain to von Hindenburg or to Hugenberg in that light. What he intended was to draw the Nazi sting by satisfying Hitler with the appearance of power, while keeping the real government in the hands of a select few—himself, the President and Hugenberg.

The stumbling-block was Hitler himself, backed by the inflexible Goering. There had been meetings at the Palace at which von Hindenburg had repeatedly tried to overcome the Nazi insistence upon supreme control. Both Goering and Hitler had been steadfast in declaring that, without it, they could not put into effect the entire National-Socialist programme and so keep their promises to the Nazi voters.

All or nothing—such a condition made Ribbentrop's task seem almost insuperable. He and Papen were agreed, but the question now was : How make Hitler agree ?

Hugenberg and the industrialists were already converts to the proposal, through fear of a greater evil than Nazism. Dread ■ Communism had brought them into line and made them ready to renew the Harzburg alliance, accepting with reluctance the protection of the Nazis against the ever-increasing danger from the Left. But to overcome the opposition of Hindenburg and the Junkers was a more difficult problem.

First, said Ribbentrop, he must be able to satisfy Hitler that Papen could perform what he promised and bring Hindenburg to agree to a Hitler Cabinet. The President was tired of deadlock and the farce of government by Chancellors who, by their dependence upon a majority in the Reichstag, could not establish effective rule. He wanted a strong authoritarian Cabinet which would derive all its power from him, regardless of elections and the nonsense of the popular will. And he feared that the accession of Hitler, with his street terrorism and party methods, would divide the country in civil war. How, asked Ribbentrop, was Hindenburg to be persuaded into the conspiracy?

Papen possessed the key to the riddle. During his Chancellorship he had ordered an enquiry to be held into the administration of the *Osthilfe* in order to still the growing murmurs of scandal both in the country and in the Reichstag. The findings of the Commission were now completed, and very damaging they were to the credit of the Junkers and to the son of the President, Colonel Oskar von Hindenburg. It would be an easy matter for Papen to drop a hint to the "Old Gentleman" that a copy of the report had found its way into the possession of Hitler, who would not scruple to make full use of it if he were not given all he wanted. The mere threat of publication would be too much for Hindenburg and his Junker friends, who were already up in arms against Schleicher over his revival of the agrarian settlement plans of Brüning. They must avoid publicity at all costs, even at the price of satisfying Hitler.

So Ribbentrop and Papen thrashed the matter out within the gilded walls of the *Herrenklub* and arranged a pretty plot to hand over Germany to the Nazis. But each had conflicting ideas as to which—Hitler or Papen—would gain the upper hand in the alliance. Ribbentrop, however mediocre in statesmanship, ■ no fool when it comes to intrigue. He knew to a nicety the value of Papen's assurances: that they would hold good until a better opportunity should come. He knew too much of him ■ place any reliance upon his sincerity, or ■ imagine that he meant to make an unconditional gift to the leader.

But he knew also that Hitler was a past-master in deception and subterfuge, and that he could beat Papen at his own tortuous game. It would not be Hitler who would be tamed and it was not Papen who presented the difficulty. The problem for Ribbentrop was to persuade Hitler to recant and accept less in the first instance when he had the right to demand all.

Now, Ribbentrop succeeded where Schleicher, Papen and even Hindenburg had failed. He persuaded Hitler to listen to what Papen had to say, and whatever bargain might be struck, whatever promises might be made to him, it was certain that they would be conditioned by events as they developed to the advantage of Hitler.

The meeting must be kept secret in order to preclude any move by Schleicher if he should hear of it. Ribbentrop arranged, therefore, that it should take place at a dinner-party at Cologne, at the house of a friend, Baron von Schroeder, the millionaire banker and financier. Papen was the first to arrive, followed a few minutes later by Hitler and Ribbentrop in a big Mercedes car.

Complete reconciliation took place between the two men, and the former Chancellor and confidant of Hindenburg shook hands with the ex-corporal and future dictator of the Third Reich. There was little to divide them in principle, for both wanted freedom from Versailles, both dreamed of a great German Empire in Europe, with wider conquests in the course of time, and both wanted power. Assured of the Chancellorship, it was not hard for Hitler to overlook Papen's past treachery.

Not all the details were settled between them then, but at least Hitler knew that he would at last become Chancellor with a preponderance of posts in the Cabinet; while Papen was content with a subordinate position, sure that, with the President behind him and with Hugenberg a minister controlling the Press and the political funds, the Nazi Leader could be tamed into docility. When Hitler and Ribbentrop left the house, their faces were wreathed in smiles.

But news ■ the meeting leaked out and came to the ears of Schleicher, and the newspapers chronicled it. To Schleicher there was only one construction possible—an intrigue against himself. His position was deteriorating rapidly, and both the Hugenberg Press and the Nazi-controlled papers made violent onslaughts upon him. To make matters worse, he was unable, or unwilling, to suppress the questions in the Reichstag about the *Osthilfe* and the insistent demands for publication of the results of the enquiry: a situation which made Papen's approach to Hindenburg all the easier.

With Hugenberg again in alliance with Hitler, the National-Socialists now had all the funds they needed, and in the elections in the State of Lippe their vote increased, strengthening greatly the claims of Hitler. Schleicher called a conference of the leaders of the *Reichsbanner*, the Social-Democrat's private army, consulting with them as to the feasibility of a *coup d'état* to be followed by the arrests of Hitler, Hugenberg and Papen. He warned the Reichswehr to be ready to march against von Hindenburg, but was too timid to act quickly. Hindenburg, confronted with the clamour of the Junkers and the industrialists and alarmed at the inability of Schleicher to suppress the demand for publication of the *Osthilfe* findings, dismissed his Chancellor and announced that he had requested Papen to form a Cabinet.

The news of Schleicher's intended action reached the President and gave force to Papen's arguments in favour of a Hitler-Hugenberg Cabinet. Hindenburg gave way, and on January 30th, 1933, little more than three weeks after the dinner-party in Cologne, Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of the Third Reich, with von Papen as Vice-Chancellor and Alfred Hugenberg in the Cabinet.

Between them, von Ribbentrop and von Papen might claim the credit for thus bringing Germany under the heel of the Nazis, for by the agreement they had reached in the *Herrenklub* they had "made" Hitler. Papen's reward was the office he coveted; Ribbentrop's was deferred awhile. Not for long, however, for the abolition of the tax on German champagne was one of the first acts of the Hitler régime. *Sekt* was declared to be the national beverage of the German people!

## CHAPTER VII

### RIBBENTROP BECOMES COMMISSIONER FOR DISARMAMENT QUESTIONS

THE bargain whereby Hitler became Reichs Chancellor was subject to conditions on both sides. Hitler insisted that approval of the new administration by the existing Reichstag was not enough: a new one must be elected and register its confidence in him. And he solemnly undertook, at Hindenburg's instance, to retain Papen and Hugenberg in his Cabinet: a promise which was broken long before the year was out.

The appeal to the nation was the prearranged farce that all the world now knows it to have been. In a Reichstag which would comprise about six hundred members, the Nazis could not expect to secure a clear majority. But eliminate a hundred Communist deputies, invent a national catastrophe, fasten the blame upon them and let the Nazis take the credit for averting a great danger—the plan was as simple in execution as it was diabolical in conception. It worked, and the Guy Fawkes of liberty went up in flames in the most fateful bonfire the world has ever seen. It is not necessary to tell again in these pages of the arrest of the Communist deputies, how their offices were raided and no vestige of evidence was found to implicate them in the plot; or of the trial of van der Lubbe and Dimitrov. It matters only that the result of the fire was to give Hitler his majority, to be followed by the Enabling Bill, giving him four years of unfettered power. Against this betrayal of the democratic constitution ■ Weimar, the Social-Democrats alone had the courage to cast their votes.

Henceforth, democracy was dead in Germany and Hitler proceeded to consolidate his gains. All parties other than the National-Socialist Party were dissolved; individual liberty, freedom of speech and of thought were suppressed. The fury of the Nazis was loosed first upon the Communists, thousands of whom were beaten up, murdered, or hounded into prisons and concentrations camps. Thaelmann, their leader, ■ still in

captivity ; and the ingenuous ask why Ribbentrop has not conceded his release to his new Bolshevik friends.

Hitler was stifling all opposition, ruthlessly moulding the nation to the Nazi pattern and branding every man, woman and child in Germany with the ugly device of the swastika. And after the Communists, the Jews.

In their case, the terror began more slowly with a one-day boycott. Then indignities were heaped upon them, followed by torture, murder and the concentration camp. Their citizenship was taken away from them, their civil rights annulled. They were barred from the professions and from all offices under the State, forced out of business, exiled and their property sequestered. There were half a million Jews in Germany, of whom many hundreds suffered death at the hands of the Nazis and many more worse than death. Hitler, an Austrian, was purifying the race of which six per cent are estimated to be pure.

There were old scores to be wiped out and dissenters from the new regime liquidated before dictatorship could come into its own and the gratifying spectacle of a unanimity of ninety-eight per cent of the electorate be exhibited to the outside world. Gregor Strasser had seceded from the Party ; once Kurt von Schleicher had dared to threaten the arrest of Hitler, and there came a time when Captain Roehm, reputed to be the Führer's most loyal friend, and Ernst Heines, chiefs of the Storm Troops, were said to be planning a *coup*. So unity was cemented in the blood-bath of June 1934, wherein they and an unknown number of doubters and dissidents, of old opponents and new, were foully done to death by the bullets of that model of forceful efficiency, Hermann Goering, and his associates. On the threshold of absolute power a dictator cannot allow mawkish sentiment to stand in his way. In some cases, the wives of the victims were shot with them.

Von Papen was lucky to escape, for his two secretaries met a violent death, but von Ribbentrop continued in favour with the Leader whom he had helped to power. At first he was given no official post in the Government, but in addition to remitting the champagne tax, Hitler gave him a semi-official though very important position as his "Principal Collaborator in Foreign Affairs." With this high-sounding title, he transferred the *Buro-Ribbentrop* to the Wilhelmstrasse, opposite the official Foreign Office, and henceforth acted in an advisory capacity to the Chancellor upon all questions affecting the relations of Germany with other countries.

Although there were many potential foreign ministers in the

Nazi Party, there was none with the tradition and experience of the old school of diplomacy. There was quite a scramble amongst the self-appointed "foreign experts" for this plum of office. Dr. Rosenberg, specialist in the project for expansion into Polish and Russian territory, had posed as an expert within the Party. Dr. Goebbels had for long taken an active interest in events beyond Germany's frontiers ; and now Herr von Ribbentrop, who had trained a staff of budding diplomats for this very purpose in his *Buro*, had enough self-assurance to imagine that he might step into the shoes of von Neurath. The new rulers of Germany, however, many of whom were mere adventurers with known records of ruffianism, understood that none of these eager aspirants would be so acceptable as von Neurath to nations which looked with apprehension at a Government of Nazis. He had been in charge of the Foreign Office in both the Papen and Schleicher administrations. Before that, he was successively Minister at Copenhagen, Ambassador at Rome and then in London. He was liked in England and was on excellent terms with Mussolini—an important factor in the post-war development of German-Italian relations.

Undoubtedly, Neurath exercised a moderating influence on the Führer during the five years of his tenure of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but often during that time Ribbentrop's influence with Hitler was paramount. From the beginning, Hitler consulted his "principal collaborator" on every matter of importance, coming to Neurath with his mind already made up. As Ribbentrop grew in importance, so there crept into the relations between the official and the unofficial Foreign Offices the serious rivalry and jealousy which culminated, on February 4th, 1938, in the achievement of his ambition and the appointment ■ a hothead to the most important office, next to Hitler's, in the whole of the Third Reich.

Ribbentrop now practically dissociated himself from all active concern in the champagne business of Henkell. Apart from his duties with the Storm Troops, in which he had lately become a leader, the direction of his own Nazi Foreign Office occupied much of his time, and he travelled often in Europe on special missions for the Führer. There was much to be done in Germany before external acts of aggression, clearly outlined in *Mein Kampf* for those few who regarded it as a serious work, might be undertaken ; and it was necessary for Hitler to know the state of public opinion abroad before he could begin to realize his ambitious programme. Affairs in Germany were in a state of confusion, her finances were in disorder, and millions

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of unemployed were looking for the redemption of the promises, so freely made in the Nazi election campaigns, to find work for all. The Rhineland was not yet demilitarized, the Saar district held in trust until the plebiscite should decree its return to the Reich. Germany was still labouring under the depressing complex of the war guilt accusation ; she was disarmed on land and on the seas, while all around her the frontiers of other nations bristled with arms. The shackles of Versailles were yet to be thrown off and full equality restored to Germany.

They were huge tasks that Hitler faced, and the attainment of all the earlier objectives is matter of history in which, so far as the internal affairs of Germany are concerned, it would be futile to deny to him great credit. In an incredibly short space of time he put Germany to work and restored her self-confidence. He banished the unemployment problem and salved the "lost generations," while there were still ten million unemployed in the United States ; three million in Great Britain. He established a common front between labour and capital and created the *Kraft durch Freude* which has regenerated the youth of the nation. When he came to power, Germany had not learned how to liquidate the losses entailed by her failure to win the Great War. He showed how to do that and taught his people how to bear the sacrifices imposed upon them by the meanness of their own soil and the surrender of rich territories and colonies. That all these things were done at the price of the loss of individual freedom and by means which could have no place in our own liberty-loving democracy, are matters which concerned the Germans themselves. It is for them, not for us, to demand an account when the false exhilaration induced by the drug of Hitlerism subsides, and so long as Germany paid no heed to world opinion and was indifferent to protests about the brutal treatment meted out to Jews, Communists and political opponents, no other country had the right to interfere in her domestic affairs.

The Reichstag went up in flames on February 27th, 1933, and on March 5th came the elections for which Hitler had stipulated. To such effect were the Communists branded with the odium ■ the crime, and so great was the intimidation ■ voters by the Storm Troops at the polls, that the National-Socialist vote increased from 11 millions in November to 17 millions in March, giving the supporters of Hitler 340 seats in the House. There were still 12 million Social-Democrats and Communists in Germany, however, and Hitler's first few months of power were largely devoted to their persecution and the elimination of all opposition within the Reich. The Party

offices were raided, their funds confiscated and their leaders thrown into concentration camps. Trade Unions were taken over by the Nazis together with the Co-operative Societies, and the first hostile moves against the Catholic and Evangelical Churches began. A boycott of the Jews took place ■ April, and soon the terror which had been vented on the Communists spread to them, increasing in fury as the weeks and months went by. In June, Alfred Hugenberg, whom Hitler had undertaken to retain, was turned out of the Cabinet, Papen lingering on for another year until the great purge of former friends and allies provided the occasion for his disposal. By the end of the year all opposition had been effectively silenced and Hitler was supreme.

There were serious repercussions outside Germany, caused as much by news of the orgies of obscene cruelty of the Storm Troops in their campaign of suppression as by the incautious and inflammatory pronouncements of the new Chancellor. Disarmament had been under discussion between the Powers at Geneva for many months and at last, in December, Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States and Germany had agreed upon a declaration in favour of "equality of rights in a system which would provide security for all nations." Equality meant Germany's right to rearm with similar weapons to those of other powers, whatever limitations and safeguards might be imposed upon her; and a Germany rearmed under Hitler must be regarded as a greater menace to the peace of Europe than under any of the preceding Chancellors.

He had denounced the Peace Treaties for many years: not only the military restrictions Versailles imposed, but the newly defined frontiers, particularly in the East. Even after he became Chancellor, in the midst of these discussions he had revived his threatening talk of the "disgraceful injustice" inflicted upon Germany by the Corridor and Danzig. The nations knew now that they had to reckon with the Nazis, whose Leader had sworn to recapture the lost territories, to create in Europe an Empire of 250 million Germans and to crush France. Small wonder is it that those whose interests were most nearly affected by the threat of German aggrandisement should have taken alarm.

One result of these fears was almost immediately apparent in the increased eagerness of the Powers to press on with negotiations for disarmament; another was seen in the action taken by Poland which, as the special object of Hitler's avowed grievance, took fright. Pilsudski asked France to join with Poland in crushing Germany ■ order to remove, before ■ was

too late, the danger which her military restoration would present. France was on the horns of a dilemma, as fearful of German militarism as any other nation, yet abhorring the prospect of another war. She refused Pilsudski's offer and thereby provided Hitler with an opportunity to weaken the ring of defensive alliances in which France had sought security.

Hitler was quick to seize his chance, alarmed in his turn by the revelation of the danger Poland's offer had exposed. In May an understanding was reached between Germany and Poland, followed later in the year by the conclusion of a non-aggression pact. Whilst this agreement gave Poland recognition of her frontiers for ten years and assured her ■ German acquiescence in the *status quo*, both in Danzig and the Corridor, it provided for Germany security from any attempt by France to attack her while she bent her energies to rearming for the wider purposes for which she had entrusted her future to Hitler. For him, it was only a postponement of part of his plans in exchange for a respite, and ten years proved to be more than enough ; for in May 1939, just six years later, Hitler denounced the Pact and German troops invaded Poland in the following September.

Disarmament talks continued to the accompaniment of Germany's reiterated demand for equality, and Ribbentrop made himself so useful to Hitler during the year 1933 that in the spring of the following year Hindenburg was persuaded to appoint him Reichs Commissioner for Disarmament Questions —the first official appointment of his career. He knew so well the strength of pacifist feeling in Britain and the horror with which French memories of the last war were filled, that he was able to assure the Führer that whatever he might do or say, he might rearm with impunity. He has recorded his own feelings at this time in the Nazi-controlled *Volkische Beobachter* : "On January 30th, 1933," he wrote, "Germany was confronted with a world devoid of all understanding and still rigid with the spirit of Versailles in the presence of her demand for absolute equality."

There was certainly some justification for his charge of a lack ■ comprehension by the Great Powers. It ■ true that it was not reasonable to expect a proud nation to remain for ever unarmed. It is equally true that the Treaty of Versailles contemplated the gradual reduction of national armaments and that the Covenant of the League stipulated general limitation to a degree "consistent with national safety and the enforcement by common action of international obligations." And for

four years disarmament had been discussed without much prospect of practical success. Early in 1932 Brüning had stated Germany's case with force and moderation. In September Papen had put forward the same demands with no better result than his predecessor. In both cases what was demanded was qualitative equality: that is, that Germany be allowed a small percentage of the kinds of arms prohibited to her, limited for a definite period during which the other nations would gradually reduce their construction and their existing armaments. By these means, the promise of the Treaty would be fulfilled and German aspirations for equality be eventually satisfied. Quantitatively, they would be content with inferiority until, by means of general disarmament, absolute equality should be attained.

Much of the support given to Hitler at the elections in November 1932 had been due to his success in playing upon the sense of injustice of the German people resulting from this inequality, and when he assumed office he was irrevocably pledged to secure the right to rearm. Germany was not only without weapons of offence—military aeroplanes, tanks and big guns—she was also deprived of adequate means of defence, in that anti-aircraft guns were forbidden her and she was debarred from building fortifications to safeguard her frontiers. Hitler claimed that if the nations did not reduce their arms to her level, Germany was automatically entitled, in virtue of the Treaty, to rearm up to theirs.

To von Ribbentrop it must have appeared, fifteen years after the end of the Great War, that "the world was still rigid in the spirit of Versailles" and that Britain supported France in her determination to keep Germany down indefinitely. After the event, ■ seems incredible that opportunity after opportunity to secure a controlled and limited rearmament by Germany, as opposed to unregulated expansion without supervision, was lost by the short-sighted views of European statesmen. Yet, French distrust of Germany was well founded, and Germans have notoriously short memories for their own diplomatic trickery and duplicity. France had experienced the treachery of the Germany of Bismarck and of Bethmann-Hollweg, and from 1919 onwards, there had been repeated evasions of Treaty obligations. Now, in the figures of German Army expenditure and in the dossier of information in the hands of the French Foreign Office, there was an accumulation ■ evidence proving that Germany had long been rearming in defiance of Versailles. ■ equality could not be granted to Brüning under the Weimar constitution, how might a

greater confidence be felt in Hitler, the author of *Mein Kampf* and ■ the reign of lawless brutality and terror which was spreading over Germany ?

The concentration camps were filling and being rapidly extended ; the persecution of the Jews proceeded apace and the nations looked on aghast at the barbarous inhumanities to which a reputedly kindly people lent themselves in the cause of national unity and the pursuit of racial purity under the guidance of an unbalanced fanatic. As the year wore on, so great was the revulsion of feeling in foreign countries ■ the atrocities of the Nazi Storm Troops, the degradation ■ the Jews, the murders not only of Democrats and Communists, but even of Nationalists and former Ministers of the Reich, that the need for a decisive gesture of unity was forced upon the Führer. He asked for a new election to provide an outward and visible sign of the solidarity of the German nation. With 100,000 police at his command, Goering dominated Prussia and the polling booths ; intimidation by the auxiliary Brownshirts reached a climax of frightfulness, and with every party but one rendered powerless even to hold a meeting ; with the big stick threatening every voter, forty million obedient Germans united to give Nazism its greatest triumph and Hitler the enforced confidence of a constrained and driven people with which to confront the world.

The election was fought by the Nazis in the sacred cause of German honour affronted by the refusal to grant equality of arms. President von Hindenburg had appealed in the name of the national honour for the unity of the entire German people in the demand for equal rights, and the mandate of the nation had been given to Hitler for that purpose. The position of France was not at all an enviable one, in spite of the demilitarized Rhineland and the guarantees of her frontiers by Britain and Italy accorded her at Locarno. There had been two alternatives before her since 1919 : either to render Germany so powerless for harm as to ensure safety without the aid of alliances, or to rely upon the collective security which the League of Nations sought to provide and to strengthen the Covenant still further by concluding alliances with States which felt similar apprehensions of German aggression. Perhaps there had been a third choice : support for the German Republic and financial aid to a genuinely democratic regime ; but it must be admitted that ■ might not have worked. Partly from fear of Communism drawing nearer through a Germany again crushed and beaten, and partly by reason of her own people's reluctance to embark upon another war,

she chose the method of non-aggression pacts and reliance upon the Covenant.

In October 1933, Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and left the League of Nations, giving as the reason for her action the failure of the Powers to disarm in pursuance of their obligations under the Treaty. It is difficult to believe that Hitler really wanted disarmament. Much more probable is it that he realized that the Conference would fail and that as German equality, according to the nations at Geneva, was to be achieved not by rearming, but only as part of a lengthy process of general disarmament, he was not likely to get what he wanted by continuing to participate in the discussions. Moreover, although equality had been recognized in principle nearly a year earlier, Britain and France had agreed that there must be a probationary period of eight years, during which Germany must give proof of good behaviour and submit to inspection of armaments.

Hitler's sweeping success at the elections in November brought home to the British Government the urgent need to press on with the efforts to reach agreement on disarmament if Hitler were not to take matters into his own hands and wreck all chances of securing the limitation of armaments. On January 29th, 1934, Britain came forward with a comprehensive scheme for general disarmament after consultations with France, Germany and Italy. About the same time, Hitler himself made proposals which differed but little from those of Britain, wherein he accepted a position of relative inferiority for Germany over a period of five years, absolute equality to be accorded in ten. He asked for an army of 300,000 men, but expressed willingness to submit to international supervision, both of his Storm Troops and of armaments. His demands for tanks, aeroplanes, and big guns were surprisingly moderate in comparison with the existing strength of France and other armed nations.

Now, if ever, a general disarmament Convention seemed to be within sight, for Britain, Belgium and Italy were in accord and ready to concede almost all the requirements of Herr Hitler. If France could be brought into line and signify her acceptance, Hitler was prepared for Germany's return to the League.

The French, however, were suspicious and demanded certain safeguards: that re-entry into the League should be made a prior condition of discussion and that guarantees of execution be given whereby Britain should afford armed support in the event of violation by Germany. These guarantees were of rather wider scope than Britain was prepared to give, but still

M. Barthou, the French Foreign Minister, appeared to be on the point of accepting almost up to the last moment. Then differences of opinion ■ the French Cabinet wrecked the whole plan, and on April 17th Barthou intimated France's rejection of the proposals. He reaffirmed the condition precedent of re-entry to the League and based the decision on the accumulated proofs of the violation by Germany of the disarmament clauses of the Treaty of Versailles.

What might have been the consequences ■ favourable consideration of Hitler's offer by France and of a firmer attitude by Britain towards France, cannot now be known, nor whether Hitler was sincere in making it. It is possible, however, that the course of European history might have been changed thereby, and that the dictator's vanity, flattered by the adoption of his own plan, might have ensured a constructive effort at disarmament and turned his ambition away from overlordship by superior might to supremacy as the instigator of peace.

Less than a week later von Ribbentrop's appointment as Commissioner for Disarmament Questions was publicly announced, accompanied by a statement that it did not signify any change in German policy, but merely represented the employment of new methods outside the normal ones of diplomatic procedure. Actually, this assurance was unnecessary, for since Hitler became Chancellor, Ribbentrop had several times handled the question in interviews with Signor Mussolini, Sir John Simon, Mr. Eden and M. Barthou. It was no more than official recognition of Ribbentrop's successful activities behind the scenes, of which none except the closest students of German affairs knew anything. It was he who had shown Hitler how to exploit the differences between the Great Powers to the advantage of Germany so that when France's emphatic refusal wrecked the prospect of agreement, Germany was able to continue rearming while insisting, conversely to the French demand, that agreement on disarmament must precede her entry into the League. His contacts with Mr. Eden and Signor Mussolini assured him that both Britain and Italy were sympathetic to a measure of rearmament for Germany, and his wide knowledge of public opinion in France and England convinced him that neither would go to war to prevent it.

He was, at this time, but little known politically, either inside Germany or in foreign countries and his name rarely appeared in the Press, but it was even then no secret amongst his intimates that he aspired to be, some day, Ambassador for

the Reich in Paris or London. He had shown great skill in reconciling other people's views during discussions which often bristled with difficulties, and Hitler's favour increased as Rosenberg's star declined. Neurath was left to deal with the routine business of the official Foreign Office while the Disarmament Commissioner tackled the principal questions of the day: a condition of affairs which became more pronounced as Ribbentrop's diplomatic successes grew in number and importance. If Hitler was insincere, using his plan to present an attitude of reasonableness as a background to his alternative demands, then failure to bring about an agreement was an achievement.

The ill-success of the British and German plans by no means ended the efforts of Britain to further the cause of disarmament, or German clamour for revision. From now onwards, Ribbentrop passed to and fro between London and Rome, urging Germany's claims. Several so-called secret visits to London were made, and during May he went direct from London to Rome to see Mussolini, with whom he talked on three separate occasions.

He seems to have made a very favourable impression on the Duce, with his plausible advocacy and smooth assurance; and apart from attracting Italian support for German claims to equality, he arranged the first meeting between Hitler and Mussolini, which took place later at Venice. There, the proposals which Ribbentrop made in June to Barthou were discussed between the two dictators. Although the Duce regarded his Nazi imitator somewhat scornfully, Hitler was almost reverentially impressed with the greatness of his Fascist preceptor and, undoubtedly, at this meeting the seed was sown which grew eventually into the Berlin-Rome Axis.

The Italians favoured disarmament but, for reasons of his own, Mussolini regarded a modified rearming of Germany with some favour. Relations between France and Italy were none too cordial over Nice and Savoy and he wished to see Germany strong enough to distract the attention of the French whilst he pursued his designs in the Mediterranean. But the condition for Germany's return to the League before France would consider any concessions remained the obstacle to progress, and towards the end of May the Disarmament Conference resumed its sittings at Geneva, without Germany. The conversations between Sir John Simon and von Ribbentrop, although the latter expressed his satisfaction with Britain's attitude, could not lead anywhere in face of French

opinion. Ribbentrop brought no new proposals and stated in an interview that his only wish was "to better the prospects of an Anglo-German understanding. Nothing is to be gained," he said, "by Germany's return to the League until equality has been not merely promised but gained. Britain's memorandum of January that Germany's return to Geneva must be a preliminary to disarmament conversations is unacceptable to Herr Hitler." He added his own views — the reasons for German distrust of the League : it had been responsible for the government of the Saar Basin and for carrying out the plebiscite in Upper Silesia.

These were hardly sufficient reasons for a refusal to re-enter the League and return to the Disarmament Conference. His interviews in London and Rome should have given him confidence in the support of both Italy and Britain in restoring equality by an agreement which would permit partial rearmament. Apparently, it paid Hitler better to continue rearming in violation of the Treaty and so avoid the imposition of limits, than to come to an arrangement which would definitely fix German inferiority in armaments for from five to ten years ahead. Von Ribbentrop, in fact, faithfully interpreting the mind of the Führer, preferred not to reach agreement : for Germany could do more by violating the Treaty than by strengthening the control of the League by her re-entry. And the League represented methods of adjustment of disputes by peaceful means and the idea of collective security as opposed to bilateral alliances, none of which could gain for long the support of the Führer if he were to achieve even a small part of his ambitious programme to make Germany great.

At the root of the failure to agree upon disarmament lay the divergences of views of British and French statesmen. From the time of the Peace Conference, France and Britain had gradually drifted apart and, time after time, when unity — purpose between them would have prevented breaches by Germany of her obligations under the Treaty, they had been divided. The trend in Britain was pronouncedly pacifist, towards isolation from European affairs and in favour of an understanding with Germany. British Conservative circles inclined to become pro-German in their outlook, too ready to take at their face value the peaceful protestations of Hitler and Ribbentrop. And Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, was not only a fervent advocate of disarmament. He had given practical expression to his views—and, — must be admitted, to the opinion of large sections of the British public —by permitting armaments to be so materially reduced that,

as time went on, a strong line in British policy on the Continent was out of the question.

Both countries had been shaken by the wave of economic depression which had swept over the world, and in France the revelations of the Stavisky case had given rise to grave unrest. Ribbentrop confided to Hitler his opinion that the effects of the scandals were so far-reaching as to mean that the French Republic was as good as finished. But the Führer knew better.

"Don't you believe it," he said. "I saw those men at Verdun ; Stavisky is not France."

The revelations, however, caused a crisis in France which strengthened considerably Germany's determination to rearm without regard to the consequences. France was looked upon by Hitler as the real obstacle to revision and equality ; England and Italy as the nations whose friendship must be cultivated. Ribbentrop's efforts were now directed, therefore, to securing the isolation of France by driving a wedge between her and her Allies. He strove hard in his talks with Sir John Simon and Mr. Eden for a closer understanding with Britain, endeavouring to convince them of Germany's need for arms and a bigger navy. Plans were discussed for restoring more normal conditions in Europe by bringing Germany back to Geneva, but the old stumbling-block remained. Hitler maintained that the only chance of a resumption of the Disarmament Conference was for Germany to declare that on account of the failure to initiate a general limitation of arms of all nations, and in order to give effect to the promise of equality of rights given her in 1932, she regards herself as freed from the limits contained in Part V of the Versailles Treaty.

From London Ribbentrop went to Paris for a talk with Barthou in an attempt to persuade him to remove the condition of Germany's return to the League as a preliminary to her re-entry into the Conference. He asked that France should reverse the decision which had caused the breakdown of the earlier conversations and agree to German rearmament limited to purely defensive weapons. He proposed that the principle of equality should be reaffirmed and that France should voluntarily limit her own armaments to existing levels and abolish offensive weapons altogether in five years' time. These proposals had been already made to Mussolini and discussed by him with Hitler at Venice.

M. Barthou replied that without guarantees and in the absence of effective control of German rearmament, he was unable to agree. Germany must attach no condition to her

return to Geneva. French statesmen were, in fact, still profoundly distrustful of German aims and honesty, of Hitler's pacifism and of Ribbentrop's reasonableness. Confronted with the British policy of avoiding entanglements abroad, France wanted a strong League of Nations in which Germany would be included, not only to control German rearmament and enforce the provisions of a prospective convention, but to be ready also to act in concert against violation of any of the Versailles frontiers by Germany. France remained obdurate and Hitler continued to rearm openly.

Meanwhile, other events of importance to the future of Europe had been taking place. In the autumn of 1933, Konrad Henlein formed the Sudeten German Party. In Austria there was a campaign of terror and bombings by the Nazis, directed and licensed from Berlin; and plans were maturing for the murder of Chancellor Dollfuss as a prelude to the annexation of Austria by Germany. 1934 was a year full of omens of violence. On June 30th, Goering and Hitler personally conducted their purge of dissenters from the new régime; in July Dollfuss was killed, his death connived at and later openly condoned by official Germany. In August President von Hindenburg died, and Adolf Hitler, substituting the title of Führer for that of President, assumed his office by decree. Barthou was killed in October.

Acts of violence within the Reich, or instigated by its leaders, produced a natural reaction in foreign countries and increased Ribbentrop's difficulties as Hitler's pacific envoy. Yet there was about him a disarming frankness which ensured him a hearing wherever he went at this time, and if any other than Hitler and the Nazis had been in power, he might have had a different tale to tell, even about his efforts with France. He was already meddling with matters unconnected with armaments, for when he was at Paris engaging Barthou in conversations in June, he proposed a "Gentleman's Agreement" between the French and German staffs, a move which aimed at checking France's policy of military alliances and security pacts. He was no more successful with this rather ingenuous proposition than with his plea for equality. In London, too, he had sought an agreement for the supply of raw materials to Germany on credit, and towards the end of the year he initiated a movement to bring about a new understanding with both Britain and France through the medium of the organizations of ex-servicemen in the three countries. In Germany the instrument to be used for this *rapprochement* was the *Stahlhelm*, or Front-line Fighters; and Ribbentrop

has since then been the *deus ex machina* in the different movements and fellowships whose object has been the furtherance of Anglo-German and Franco-German friendship. Indeed, so many mysterious visits did he pay to the different capitals of Europe at this time, so varied were his missions and so cloaked with privacy, that he became known in the Press as the "Mystery Man of Europe," a title to which he might well lay claim.

In November 1934 he appeared in London, announcing that his visit was a private one made for the purpose of visiting friends in Scotland. The next day, however, he had an interview with Mr. Eden. Germany was searching for a way back to the League, and Ribbentrop was assured that Britain would welcome her not only at Geneva, but at the Disarmament Conference, which still survived after many vicissitudes. The assertion that "the massive rearmament of Germany on land, at sea and in the air, has now been all but realized" made her return a matter of urgency. The French Press became indignant, nervous at his presence so often in London. "What is happening," one paper declared, "is that a vast plan to get Germany's rearmament legalized by the Great Powers is being born."

By this time, rearmament was almost a *fait accompli*, as Ribbentrop brazenly said. There was but little now that either Britain or France could do about it, or that Italy wished to do, without actually going to war. Lost opportunities had given Germany too big a start.

The turn of the year brought the Saar back to Germany, the last of her pledges in the pawnshop of Versailles, redeemed after fifteen years of separation by an overwhelming majority in a plebiscite. It was a triumph for the Nazi regime and for Hitler, bringing back the vast coal mines which were so necessary to supplement effective rearming. But it meant a greater feeling of insecurity for France, and it became necessary for her to consider other methods of ensuring her safety. She would have accepted the German disarmament plans if Britain had been willing to guarantee the whole of the Versailles settlement, but no such guarantee had been forthcoming. She turned, therefore, to Russia and pursued negotiations for a Security Pact in Eastern Europe.

In February 1935, MM. Laval and Flandin on behalf of France, reached an agreement in London which proposed a Western Air Pact between Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, providing for joint action by all the signatories in case of sudden aerial aggression. This was com-

municated to the other interested Powers and at once met with the approval ■ all three. But, incorporated with the Franco-British proposals was a suggestion for an Eastern Security Pact, which was intended to operate in Eastern Europe on somewhat similar lines to the Locarno Treaties in the West. Germany was ready to agree to the Air Convention, but was not willing to enter into a pact in the East which would bring Russia into a general settlement. Nor, on the other hand, could either France or Russia view with unmixed feelings an understanding between Germany and the Western Powers which, by avoiding the question of general security over all Europe, implied that no protection was offered to frontiers ■ the East, where Germany was most likely to look for expansion.

Part ■ the scheme was immediately attainable, but again distrust of Germany, fortified by the signing of the Franco-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact on February 28th, prevented any agreement being reached ; and on March 7th, France extended the period of conscription for her army to two years. On March 11th Ribbentrop delivered a speech which was brimful of significance, but was intended to create a calm atmosphere for Hitler's counterblast to the step France had taken.

"Our army is an instrument for National Defence," he asserted. "Its modern spirit is not aggressive imperialism, but devotion to duty in Germany. If all other armies were animated by the same spirit, we could count on twelve years of peace."

On March 16th he was followed by Hitler who, referring to the French decision to expand her army, repudiated the Disarmament Clauses of the Versailles Treaty and announced the reintroduction of conscription into Germany, limited to one year's service. The assurance of the pacific spirit which would animate the new German Army, so glibly uttered by the Commissioner for Disarmament Questions and reaffirmed by Hitler, was necessary as a sedative for the nerves of Europe, but could bring no comfort to those whose flaccidity or intransigence had contributed so much to Germany's military resurrection. Britain, too, had commenced to rearm.

Hitler was now openly consulting with both Rosenberg, the specialist on expansion towards the East, and Ribbentrop on foreign policy before von Neurath ; and what had been merely jealousy between the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the *Buro-Ribbentrop* had developed into a struggle for the control of foreign policy. But Ribbentrop, young and keenly ambitious, with all the graces at his command and astute

enough in diplomacy never to commit himself to a forthright statement, was gaining fresh laurels almost daily. His star was in the ascendant, and more and more he encroached upon the preserves ■ the official Foreign Office and ousted the unofficial Rosenberg in the Führer's favour. It was von Ribbentrop who, in Hitler's absence, received the British Foreign Secretary, Sir John Simon, who had gone to Berlin to try to pull the irons out of the fire. The interview with the Führer had been postponed for a fortnight because, ■ was announced, Hitler was suffering from a sore throat. Mr. G. Ward Price, of the *Daily Mail*, records an interview with Ribbentrop in which he asked whether the indisposition was a diplomatic one. The latter assented, highly amused at the notion of the discomfiture of the British Minister awaiting Hitler's pleasure.

The widening of the gulf between French and British views caused by different reactions in the two countries to Hitler's repudiation of the military restrictions of Versailles, gave Ribbentrop his next big chance. In Britain, detachment from the troubles of Europe resulting from her insular position enabled Ministers to regard the fact of German rearmament with fewer qualms than France. Her main concern was the maintenance of her supremacy at sea to ensure the safety of her lines of communication with the far-distant parts of her Empire, and to secure that there should be no threat from Germany by a navy which might challenge her own. Throughout the negotiations for disarmament, the question of German naval rearmament had not been overlooked, but was regarded necessarily as part and parcel of the entire scheme. But Hitler had announced not merely his intention to rearm; he had disclosed publicly that Germany already possessed a fleet ■ military aeroplanes and that submarines were actually in course of construction. After so many failures in concert with France, it would be folly to allow what was to Britain the most important part of any German rearmament to remain an item in a problematical general scheme of disarmament. Accepting, however reluctantly, the increase in Germany's strength on land, she sought to salve her own paramount interests from the wreck of the Conference hopes by negotiating directly with Germany a bilateral Naval Agreement. Hitler, weathering the wordy condemnations of the League of Nations and the short-lived Stresa Front against Germany, was well satisfied with the success of his violation of the Treaty and was in accommodating mood. He had already demanded an increase in the German navy, but had stated that he would be

content to limit ■ to thirty five per cent of British strength. After preliminary exchanges of views, Ribbentrop was entrusted with the task of negotiating the agreement and came to London on June 2nd, as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Reich at the head of an imposing delegation. With him were Rear-Admiral Schuster and General von Kiderlin, but the German Ambassador in London, Herr von Hoesch, was ■ and unable to take part in the discussions.

His mission was regarded as evidence of his increasing influence in the shaping of German foreign policy. Writing at this time, Mr. Ward Price declared : " So much does Hitler rely on his judgment and advice that when he retires to Munich or Berchtesgaden to prepare an important international pronouncement, he invariably takes Ribbentrop with him. In their hands the political future of Europe lies."

The negotiations were quickly brought to a successful conclusion and resulted in the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. The international treaties on which naval construction was based were due to end in 1936, and this new agreement undoubtedly made a great contribution towards the maintenance of peace and prevented a race in naval armaments. It provided that 35 to 100 was to be a permanent relation between the strengths of the German and British navies, whatever naval construction might be undertaken by other Powers, and whether the British navy was limited by treaty or not. Further, in order to avoid the uncertainty which would result from a system of limitation solely by total tonnage, calculations of strength were to be made by categories of ships, thus avoiding a proponderance of any one class of vessel.

Both Britain and Germany were in agreement that submarines should be abolished altogether, but ■ was impossible to incorporate in the agreement a provision giving effect to their views because certain other nations wished to retain the submarine as a weapon. Ribbentrop therefore undertook voluntarily that the exercise of Germany's right to build submarines should not, for the time being, exceed forty-five per cent of the British submarine tonnage. ■ circumstances, by which was meant a great increase in construction by some other Power, should compel a change in the ratio, the percentage would only be exceeded after friendly discussion and agreement. And the whole German submarine tonnage at all times was to be within the total tonnage calculated from the ratio of 35 to 100.

Opinion in Britain hailed the conclusion of the agreement as a great step forward towards peace and the general limita-

tion of armaments throughout the world. Undoubtedly in 1935 Ribbentrop was a sincere advocate of Anglo-German friendship, and he believed that his success would lead to a complete understanding between the two nations.

Ribbentrop himself regarded the agreement as the beginning of a practical peace policy, describing it as "the cornerstone of peace." He claimed that the chief result of the negotiations was that "we have broken the ice in the rigid political situation in Europe," that it was only the first step towards universal limitation of armaments, and that it settled a vital naval problem between Germany and Britain once and for all. Europe in the past, he said, had made the mistake of undertaking too much at once.

Through this agreement, which controlled German naval construction until, in May 1939, Hitler repudiated it as a reprisal for the British promise to aid Poland against aggression, the menace of the submarine has been proportionately reduced, and Britain was assured of vital naval supremacy over Germany when war broke out. The ratio of tonnage to which Germany bound herself, moreover, made the building of battleships of greater size than the disappointing "pocket" variety impracticable.

The satisfaction of Ribbentrop and of Britain was not shared by all, for in certain quarters it was considered that by entering into an agreement with Germany Britain had given countenance to German rearmament and thereby legalized Hitler's violation of Part V of the Treaty. It might be truer to say that what was done was to recognize a fact which could not now be altered without resort to war. And when the proceedings of the League, the Preliminary Disarmament Commission and the Conference itself, over a period of nine years are considered in the light of this agreement, it must stand out as a concrete achievement in marked contrast to the failures to grasp the chance of an Air Locarno, to restrict and ultimately abolish bombing planes, to institute international supervision of arms, to secure only limited rearming by Germany over a period of five to ten years—all of which might have been had if the weakness of British statesmanship and the short views of the French had not frittered away the opportunities.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE DUPPLICITY OF RIBBENTROP'S DIPLOMACY AND OF GERMAN FOREIGN POLICY

THE year 1935 was a notable one for von Ribbentrop, for the successful negotiation of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement was only one outcome of his many activities. He was advancing rapidly in Hitler's esteem and friendship and travelling extensively in Europe as his special envoy charged with missions of importance. Besides his journeys to Paris, London, Rome and Brussels, he had been seen more than once in Warsaw, Vienna and Prague. Almost always these visits were ostensibly of a private nature—shooting chamois in Austria, hunting trips, or staying with friends, of whom he had many amongst the rulers and aristocracies of the various countries. Yet observers sometimes noticed after one of these excursions a new cordiality or some change in the relations between Germany and the country in which he had been staying.

In September his second son was born. There were now four children, another daughter, Ursula, having arrived on the scene three years earlier. The new addition to the family brought them great happiness and also pleased the Führer, who is very fond of young children. He used to make a great fuss of Dr. Goebbels' daughter, and people remarked how jealous Ribbentrop was of the attentions Hitler paid her. As soon as the Nazis were in office, a motherhood campaign had been launched, under the direction of Rudolf Hess, perhaps to offset that other campaign for racial purity; or maybe to provide that solid block of authentic Germans in Europe for which living space was to be taken from other independent peoples.

Hitler offered to be the new baby's godfather, and it was given the names of Adolf, after him, and Barthold, in memory of the ancestor of that name who had distinguished himself in the Napoleonic wars. There were tears of gratitude in Ribbentrop's blue eyes when he told his friends about this act of condescension on the part of the great Leader. The feeling may have been genuine, but he is so thorough a sycophant that

he has become equally adept in exhibitions of passionate anger and in the art of shedding copious tears in imitation of the strange emotional storms of the Führer.

When not engaged on special missions for Hitler he was busy sounding opinion abroad, inflaming the Nazis in neighbouring States or finding out the depth of the probable reaction to some new project, so that its effect might be accurately gauged in advance. He was becoming the diplomatic mentor of the Reich, observing the behaviour of Germany's ambassadors, of whom a goodly number had been taken over by the Nazis from previous Administrations on account of the lack of trained diplomats in the ranks of the Party. The older type of diplomat needed careful supervision lest, not being true Nazis at heart, they should not represent faithfully the new spirit of truculence in German foreign policy. In course of time Ribbentrop built up a comprehensive system of checks on the doings of Nazi representatives abroad which deprived them of much of their former freedom and initiative. His agents penetrated everywhere, active in Nazi propaganda and intrigue, some under the sheltering wings of the embassies, others spying unobtrusively on the ambassadors themselves.

Upon the reports of Ribbentrop and his agents the Führer's renunciation of Part V of the Treaty and the outline of policy enunciated in his speech of May 21st were based. In the latter the Führer reaffirmed German determination to abide by the Locarno Treaties and even proposed an extension of them to include an Air Pact. He gave a solemn promise that, apart from the military restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, which he had repudiated in March, Germany would respect its territorial and other provisions and would only seek such revision as might become inevitable in course of time by peaceful means. Further, he advocated the prohibition of air bombs and gas in warfare and limitation of the size of big guns and tanks. The dimensions of the army had already been indicated in confining conscription to one year's service. With a finality which would now arouse the gravest suspicions, he declared that "under no circumstances" would Germany depart from this.

Until 1936, when Ribbentrop became ambassador in London, he went everywhere in Europe, always with an air of mystery surrounding him. Each journey had its purpose; each contact in a foreign country helped Hitler to fit another piece into the jig-saw puzzle of European affinities and animosities. The extension of conscription, the re-entry into the Rhineland, the infractions of Versailles and Locarno—all the departures

from the emphatic assurances given by the Führer in that speech of May 21st—were planned on the basis of the reliable judgments with which his envoy supplied him.

Hitler's sincerity has so often been questioned that ■ may be more profitable to consider where Ribbentrop stood during those years. Hitler, we know, was only putting into operation the first part of the programme laid down in *Mein Kampf*: a programme whose very extravagance led people outside Germany to make the mistake of paying too little attention to it. But Ribbentrop had read, marked, learned and inwardly digested the "Nazi Bible." It would be idle to pretend, however fairly we deal with him, that he could regard as final each separate step as it was taken, or that he could have any belief in the inviolability of the Führer's solemn declarations to respect the treaties. In all matters of foreign policy he was more closely in touch with Hitler than any other of his advisers, and now that events have shown how faithfully Hitler has kept to the doctrines as well as the designs of *Mein Kampf*, it is beyond all question that Ribbentrop has been throughout a well-informed partner in the deceptions, the broken promises and the violations of honour with which the path to domination is littered.

He was always an opportunist, without any deep principles underlying his convictions. As a man of great wealth and privilege whose income depended upon the prosperity of the champagne industry, he was fanatically anti-Communist; and fear of Communism had first driven him towards National-Socialism. In accepting it as the only defence against the peril of Bolshevism, he assimilated the rest of the programme readily enough as a practical means of expressing his own vehement nationalism. He had no great enthusiasm for the Nordic Blood mysteries of Rosenberg, his *Mythus*, or the nonsense about race psychology. He was too coldly intelligent to believe in such theories, but they were part of the prescription from which the pill was compounded and were inseparable from the other ingredients. Hitler, on the other hand, not only conscientiously believed in them, but founded his nationalism upon them and used them to key the masses of the people up to the required pitch of greatness needed to make the execution of his plans possible.

Looking backward, when so large a part of the first stages of his ambition has been realized, it can be seen how almost every event since 1933 has been carefully calculated to render possible the adventures of the succeeding years; how nicely the parts have fitted into the whole.

The plan was simple enough in its broad outlines, but extremely difficult to put into practice. Bearing in mind that the ultimate goal was world supremacy, obviously Europe must first be brought under Germany's heel, and Hitler had the choice of beginning either in the East or in the West. For a long time he held to the idea of crushing France as the dominant military power on the Continent, before turning his attention eastwards. But East or West, he had to make Germany strong first.

He did so by luring the stupid masses at home into surrendering their liberties, crushing all opposition and rigidly controlling newspapers, cinemas and wireless. He drummed into their untenanted minds the conception that the State is above all religious and moral laws and then proceeded to make them military minded and arrogant for conquest. Pacifism and surrender were synonymous and "the last decision belongs to violence." He instilled into them "the spirit of attack" and without much difficulty convinced them of their unquestioned superiority as a nation. Hence he was able to reintroduce conscription in 1935 with the apparent support of the whole nation.

In June of the same year Ribbentrop negotiated a treaty with Great Britain which, by allowing Germany to build a navy, in effect sanctioned her rearmament. From then onwards, Hitler harnessed the energies of the nation into building up a military power capable of pursuing a foreign policy which Dr. Rauschning describes as going "beyond the most extreme limits any nation has consciously set itself in the past."<sup>1</sup> It was a policy of unlimited territorial expansion, the end of which was to be the redistribution of the world under the leadership of Germany. He had already rejected the principle of collective security and the settlement of disputes by peaceful means by leaving the League of Nations. By means of the pact with Poland he had put an obstacle in the way of Russian interference and had secured in Danzig an outpost for the disruptive activities of Nazi agents, many of whom were already at work in Austria, Czechoslovakia and other countries undermining the authority of their Governments.

The creation of a great army had as its object something far greater than the recovery of prestige and the restoration of equality with other nations. Alone Germany could achieve but little, however strong she might become. France was considered to be the arch-enemy then, but Hitler fully realized the need for powerful allies if she were to be annihilated. The

<sup>1</sup> *Germany's Revolution of Destruction*, p. 194.

friendship of Great Britain and Italy, therefore, was essential, as he wrote in *Main Kampf*.

The choice of Italy as an ally presented but few difficulties. Hitler fervently admired the Fascist State, which he himself had imitated ; and the conflict of her interests with those of France in the Mediterranean and in Africa should make her susceptible to his advances. There was, of course, Mussolini's role as protector of the Danube States to be considered, but this drawback was outweighed in Hitler's mind by the Duce's hatred of Bolshevism and his fear of the spread of internationalism.

The case of Great Britain was more problematical. Hitler had no love for her free institutions and regarded democratic England as a dying nation, her Empire as slowly disintegrating. He was inordinately jealous of that Empire but could see no other way to the subjugation of France than by securing British co-operation. He believed that England would eventually be opposed to French military supremacy on the Continent and would herself some day seek an alliance with another continental Power.

Hence, there must be a triple alliance of England, Italy and Germany against France. The purpose of this alliance would be war against France for a mutual extension of power, for an alliance which has not war as its aim is "senseless and worthless." Without doubt, he entertained a poor opinion of British idealism, for he thought to inveigle England into the alliance by saying : If you shut your eyes to what I want to do in Europe, I won't interfere with you. He saw no reason why England should not be satisfied with the assurance that she would be left in the enjoyment of her possessions while Germany made herself mistress of Europe. Britain's interests lay overseas, while Europe was Germany's concern, and when France was reduced to impotence, Italy would have her Mediterranean and African Empire, Britain would remain intact and in undisturbed possession of her Empire, while Germany despoiled France of Alsace and Lorraine and the zone of the Channel Ports. Subjugation of the rest of Europe would then be only a matter of time.

The dismemberment of Russia was to follow and Germany would seize the Polish and Russian Ukraine and become supreme in the Baltic States. Rosenberg, in fact, regarded the Russians as an Asiatic race who must be turned out of Europe ; and the Poles and Czechs were amongst those lesser breeds who were to be dispossessed in face of the overriding claims of a superior race.

These plans were necessarily elastic and subject to the ever-changing conditions in Europe. There have been, in fact, many alterations, not in the ultimate aims of either hegemony in Europe or the final world supremacy of Germany, but in the tactics to be employed to secure those aims. As in the plan of a battle or of a campaign, an unexpected check or encouragement must be instantly taken into account or exploited, so in the Nazi moves on the chess-board of Europe was each new factor in the international situation pounced upon and turned to cynical advantage, even though it might entail the postponement of part of an ambition or the temporary sacrifice of a prize which might be retrieved later.

Ribbentrop was the observer who watched for these changes, drew his conclusions from them and reported to Hitler. He came to believe that France—depopulated, pacifist and submissive to the repeated *coups* and bloodless victories of Hitler—was, like England, a dying nation from which Germany had little to fear. Britain in his eyes was equally unresponsive to continual goadings, anxious only to retain her precarious hold upon an Empire that was straining to break the bonds which she was too weak and senile to keep secure. The lengths to which disarmament had been carried by her, and to a lesser but still important extent by France, at the very moment when Germany was rearming, introducing conscription and emerging again as a first-class military Power; the knowledge that a democratic form of government hampered their decisions and made the application of a strong foreign policy difficult for both of them; the differences of opinion between them, causing disunity in action—all these tendencies combined to give birth in his mind to the idea that it was no longer necessary for Germany to fight France before commencing her conquests in the East. Internal troubles and the growth of Communism in France strengthened this view, and in course of time, when the Rhineland was reoccupied without bringing Allied intervention, when Sanctions were ineffectively applied against Italy at the time of her invasion of Abyssinia, when the farce of intervention in Spain had been played to a finish and when Belgium had been lured into a declaration of neutrality, it became an axiom of Nazi foreign policy that German expansion in the East would provoke no armed conflict with France, who would passively accept relegation to a position of inferiority in Europe. As for Britain, the belief persisted until guarantees were given to Poland in the early summer of 1939, that she could still be brought to Germany's side. She

was, in any case, the world's outstanding example ■ decay, her decadence demonstrated by the trend in her empire towards a free commonwealth of nations—a voluntary renunciation of dominance far beyond the comprehension of the Nazis.

Hitler was profoundly ignorant of conditions in France and England, radically misinformed by Ribbentrop in regard to the state of opinion in those countries, although the latter always had full opportunity for knowing the truth. The Nazi policy was deflected in its immediate aim, therefore, from the West to the East and the South-East where, with Britain obligingly guarding her rear and Italy her flank, Germany would be free to subdue by stages the sub-races whose lands she coveted for her own growing population. There would be time enough to turn on France when a great block of Central Europe should be under Nazi control and eighty to a hundred million Germans would render resistance to a demand for the handing over of her northern coast line to Germany futile. Belgium, Holland and Denmark would lose their sovereignty together with most of their territory, and German influence would be supreme in the Baltic and extend from the shores of the Atlantic across Europe to the Black Sea.

There could, of course, be no set schedule for these stages in the attainment of Hitler's objectives, the expediency of the moment always determining every move. Poland, for instance, fearing Russia more than she distrusted Germany and rapidly developing into an important military Power, was at one time considered as a likely ally at the price of some temporary sacrifice of German claims in the Corridor. Italy, too, although anti-Bolshevist, was highly susceptible to any encroachment on her Balkan preserves or threat of interference with Austria's independence. Efforts must be made to fan Italian distrust of France and to separate still further France and Britain and thus bring about what would, in these days, be called a Berlin-London-Rome Axis. For in 1935, and until after the Rhine-land was reoccupied, France was still regarded as the mortal foe, the obstacle to every claim for the most elementary of German rights; a perpetual threat to the very existence of Germany as a nation. In that year a good beginning was made with England by the conclusion ■ the naval agreement; and in the autumn, Mussolini's assault upon Abyssinia gave Hitler the chance to gain Italian favour by demonstrating his benevolent attitude towards Fascist banditry. The application of ineffective Sanctions by the League Powers and their subsequent abandonment caused a breach between the former

Allies which drew Italy and Germany closer together and, in course of time, led to the Italo-German military alliance.

The immediate exploitation of temporary or fortuitous conditions in Europe—Hitler's remarkable power of sudden adaptability to each new set of circumstances—is but one facet of the many-sided nature of German foreign policy as revealed in its changes since the National-Socialists set about the renovation of Germany and Central Europe. Moreover, the depth to which German diplomacy has sunk since 1933 calls for some further reference to the written and spoken words of Hitler beside the explanation which mere expediency and opportunism offer.

There is, first, Hitler's frank advocacy of the use of the lie which, allied to skilful and persistent propaganda, can persuade people to believe "that Heaven is Hell or conversely." The bigger the lie, he argues, the more certain is ■ to gain credence: a truth which he has demonstrated many times over by forcing the acceptance of innumerable self-evident fallacies on his "immutably stupid" people. In matters of international moment, the use he has made of lying is shown by the attention which statesmen in foreign countries have paid to such falsehoods as his repeated promises to abide by treaties, his assurances of peaceful intentions and his positive renunciations of territorial ambitions. Unfortunately, the use of false promises and lies by Germany's rulers has not been restricted to misleading their own people. It has permeated all Germany's dealings with other countries until, after Munich, the unblushing duplicity and dissimulation of German diplomatic actions and the utter worthlessness of Hitler's word became so patent that now the issue of peace aims is clouded by calculations of the length of time that will be required to re-educate the nation to a normal standard of honesty which will make their adherence to the terms of a treaty binding on their honour after the Nazi elements have been finally eradicated.

The practice of the permissive lie and the guileful promise is, however, closely connected with the most dangerous doctrine that has ever polluted international relations—the doctrine ■ the paramountcy of the Nazi State. When we in England declare that "The King can do no wrong," we mean that the throne ■ above our man-made laws. But the Nazi interpretation of an analogous maxim to the effect that the State can do no wrong is that nothing that is done for the advantage of Germany can be considered as wrong. Whether it transgresses the civilized usages of international law and the sanctity of treaty obligations, or overrides the dictates of

humanity ; whether it be an offence against religion or the laws ■ morality, if ■ brings increase to the nation it is commendable. The black swastika replaces the Cross and Adolf Hitler—hailed by the Reichsminister for Church Affairs as “the true Holy Ghost”<sup>1</sup>—brings Christianity into line with the needs of Germany.

Hitler once declared to Dr. Rauschning, a former president of the Danzig Senate, “I would conclude any treaty in good faith and yet be ready to break it in cold blood the next day if that was in the interest of the future of Germany.”

As with Hitler, so with his lieutenants ; and none has aped him more meticulously or more recklessly than von Ribbentrop. They all know that any lie, any deceit, any mean action, is robbed of its turpitude by reason of its utility to Germany. Working on these declared principles of dishonour, Goering’s word of honour given to the Czechs, Hitler’s recognition of Austrian sovereignty, the intrepid perjuries of Dr. Goebbels and Ribbentrop’s spurious pretext of rejection of proffered terms by Poland, become meritorious and carry no condemnation. They are haloed by the same reasoning that raised the murderers of Dollfuss to a glorious martyrdom and caused the sadists of Potempa to be adopted as brothers by the Führer.

These subversions of ethical standards explain much that would otherwise remain obscure and irreconcilable in the foreign policy of the Third Reich during the last few fateful years. They explain why Hitler can assert that he has never broken his word, because his word is only valid when given to the German people. They illumine Ribbentrop’s placid assurances of the genuineness of his desire for friendship with Britain ; and they show how “the Architect of the Anti-Comintern Pact” was able to go to Moscow and conclude with his Communist foe a bargain which sacrificed the Poles and threw the Finns to the Bolshevik wolves. The plan is Hitler’s and his alone ; the decisions are his. But the details of the design are filled in by Ribbentrop and its execution ■ debited to his private account. “The group around Hess, together with, for instance, Ribbentrop, in spite ■ some blunders, and Bohle, carry much more weight. The official experts, and such men as von Neurath, are used only as advisers on formalities, on the modification and adjustment of the over-smart policy of the regime and in polishing the phraseology of drafts.”<sup>2</sup> That was written some time before Ribbentrop’s appointment

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Mrs. E. O. Lorimer in *What Hitler Wants*.

<sup>2</sup> *Germany’s Resolution of Destruction*, p. 196.

as Foreign Minister, which brought a fuller and more devastating application of the principles of expediency and falsehood to the conduct of the foreign affairs of Germany and projected her into the war which Hitler wanted to avoid and Ribbentrop recklessly sought.

That eminent public men in England did not see the danger signal sooner is, perhaps, attributable to reluctance to believe that aims so wildly improbable could be seriously entertained by men to whom a whole nation had entrusted its future. *Mein Kampf* and the Nazi doctrines were simply too bad to be true. But what the occupation of Prague foreshadowed became crystal clear in the light of the German-Soviet Pact of aggression. Expediency and opportunism are the tactics, falsehood and broken faith the means whereby the Greater Germany is to be built.

It will endure until the motives of its rulers are universally understood.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RHINELAND AND THE BOGUS PLANS FOR PEACE

**S**PEAKING in the House of Commons so long ago as November 1934, Sir John Simon said: "Disarming ourselves in advance, by ourselves, by way of an example, has not increased our negotiating power in the disarmament discussions at Geneva."

It was not only in the discussions about disarmament that we were handicapped by our military weakness. That insufficiency was only too well known to Hitler and strengthened him in his opinion of our decadence. It gave him the courage to defy France and Britain, to rearm, introduce conscription, refortify the Rhineland and then, secure in the West, concentrate his whole attention upon his aims in the centre of Europe.

Opinion in England was strongly anti-militarist and almost pro-German in its sympathies. The view was prevalent, both in the Cabinet and in the country, that Britain should enter into no commitments abroad which might involve her in a war to serve the interests of France, or save some country remote in Europe; a war which could conceivably bring her no direct advantage. Consequently, although Ministers were fully informed of the extent of the reduction in armaments and knew how it lessened their prestige in the eyes of the totalitarian nations, no programme of rearmament could be put in hand until the country had been made to realize the dangers and disadvantages of inferiority. The process of enlightening the British public extended over a year, and in November 1935, Mr. Stanley Baldwin returned to power with a majority pledged to provide adequate defensive rearmament. In March of the following year the first serious steps to this end were taken.

Hitler was not alone in assessing the shrunken might of Britain, or in seeing what advantage might be gained from dissensions between the two principal Versailles Powers. In October 1935 Signor Mussolini defied the League of Nations,

snapped his fingers ■ Great Britain and loosed his armies upon Ethiopia in a war of savage aggression and brutal conquest. Italian claims upon Abyssinia, which was an equal member State of the League, should rightfully have been made the subject of negotiation, but Mussolini repudiated the obligation which Italy's own membership imposed. He declined the offers to cede territories to Italy, refused all mediation, refused half Ethiopia, and insisted upon the right of Might to conquer and take by force of arms. All through the summer he had poured contempt upon Britain, her depleted army, her weak air force and her obsolete navy. He challenged the League, which must either take steps against the aggressor or abdicate.

At Geneva Sir Samuel Hoare took the lead in an endeavour to uphold the Covenant ■ Collective Security and to preserve the authority of the League. Britain was ready to impose Sanctions to the fullest extent and, in conjunction with France, use her fleet to enforce them. But recently, at Rome, M. Laval had reached an understanding with the Duce which the latter interpreted as giving Italy a free hand in Ethiopia. France was not now prepared to stand by the Covenant upon which she had consistently relied for the preservation of her own security. The paradox arose that France would tolerate a glaring breach of the Covenant by a friendly Power but would invoke the binding force of contractual obligations in any case in which Germany was the transgressor, while Britain, on the other hand, having in the past persisted in condoning Germany's violations ■ treaties, now for the first time was eager to put into full operation against Italy all the pains and penalties of the pact of international security.

France agreed to the application of limited economic sanctions, but insisted upon the postponement of the oil sanction and the blockade: the only really effective weapons for enforcing the almost unanimous decision of the League. So, while Italian aeroplanes rained gas bombs upon the Ethiopians, Mussolini's anger at Britain turned to enmity. Germany and Italy drew closer together and Hitler's theories of Britain's ineptitude and loss of power, of the essential incompatibility of the French and British, and of his own doctrine that success ■ the sole criterion of right and wrong, were abundantly reinforced. He learned—if he had not always known it—that demands which are supported by a show of armed strength and the apparent intention to use it will succeed, however unjust and predatory they may be. If Italy's Ethiopian campaign were not enough proof, there was

Japan's action in Manchukuo and his own flagrant violations of Versailles by rearming and introducing conscription.

His earlier steps to compel adjustment of the inequalities resulting from Versailles had been sheer bluff : risking retaliation without the power to resist it, on the assumption raised by Ribbentrop that Britain was too weak militarily to take action ; trading on the knowledge that no Government either in that country or in France would dare to go to war in defiance of public opinion at home, which wanted peace at any price. But although each bluff added to Germany's strength, rendering the use of force against her always a greater undertaking, Hitler was not yet in a position to commence the game of power politics. Before that stage could be reached there was still the greatest gamble of all : the military reoccupation of the Rhineland.

During the autumn and winter of 1935 Italian hostility towards Great Britain increased in vehemence ; so much so that Mr. Baldwin's Cabinet, in March of the following year, issued a White Paper outlining a long-overdue policy of defensive rearmament. It placed the responsibility for the increase in armaments upon "the campaign of violent and menacing propaganda in Italy, largely directed against the United Kingdom. We can no longer disregard the possibility of an incident arising which might precipitate an extension of the conflict in Ethiopia." It pointed further to the unwarranted extent to which the Italian garrison in Libya was being reinforced.

In the midst of all the talk of war and while Britain was still, to all intents, unarmed, Hitler weighed the risks of a re-entry into the Rhineland. Rearmament alone was almost useless ■ him so long as a vast, unfortified tract on the left bank of the Rhine left Germany exposed to an attack in the rear by France when the time came for him to realize his ambitions in Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Yet the demilitarized zone, to remain permanently unfortified, was not only stipulated by Versailles, the dictated treaty ; ■ had been reaffirmed in 1925 at Locarno, where Germany, negotiating as an equal with Britain, France and Italy, secured in return the withdrawal of Allied troops from the occupied territories and a collective guarantee of security. It was no longer a fight against Versailles ; what was in contemplation was a breach of international honour by the arbitrary removal of the barrier upon which France relied, more than on her pacts, for security against attack by Germany. And ■ his Reichstag speech in May 1935, Hitler had specifically promised to fulfil

all obligations imposed by Locarno although referring, it must be said, ■ the difficult nature of the Rhineland problem.

Reoccupation was not in any way essential to German security, and ■ German troops were to march into the Rhineland, there could be only one construction placed upon their action—the intention to re-establish the full military strength of Germany, to put her in a position to threaten France and to hold her historic foe in check while pursuing designs of conquest and expansion in the East. At the same time French statesmen realized, however uneasily, that at some future date Germany must be permitted to exercise her full sovereign rights over her own territory, but they rightly expected the restoration ■ the Rhineland's military status to be the subject of negotiation leading to an agreement which would provide for gradual reoccupation. Complete fortification, they thought, should only be attained after the lapse of some years. In these circumstances it was regarded as a foregone conclusion that France would suffer no sudden and violent re-entry without resorting to arms to repel it.

The fatal disagreement between France and Great Britain in regard to the application of sanctions against Italy supplied Hitler with a heaven-sent opportunity. But when he informed the German General Staff of his intention to risk what could only be a reverse of untold magnitude if France retaliated with force, he found himself confronted with the determined opposition of von Fritsch and his military colleagues. They told him that German troops, opposed by the superior equipment of the French, would be driven back with ease. They urged that the proposed action could only end in a catastrophe such as would lead to the reoccupation of the zone by foreign soldiers and render German military resurgence impossible for an indefinitely prolonged period.

The Führer, however, had his own Foreign Office, his own adviser on whose supposed knowledge of the probable effects in France and England of his gambler's choice he placed more reliance than in the judgment of von Neurath and the Generals, reinforced as they were by the objections raised by Schacht on economic grounds. Von Ribbentrop had paid several visits recently to both London and Paris and had entertained at his stately home in Berlin eminent visitors from both countries. He came to the conclusion that in spite of an assurance of French intention to act if German troops entered the prohibited zone, conveyed by M. Flandin to the British Government, no action would be taken ■ the deed were accomplished quickly as a surprise move, and was accompanied by conciliatory offers

of peaceful negotiations before a joint plan ■ resistance could be put into operation.

At the beginning of March, Hitler made an offer to negotiate couched in reasonable terms. On March 6th, while Allied statesmen congratulated each other upon the unexpectedly benevolent attitude of the usually intractable Führer, he made his decision to send his troops into the Rhineland. The next day, as the Germans were marching in, foreign ambassadors were informed that Germany renounced Locarno and proposed to reoccupy the demilitarized zone.

In every Chancery in Europe there was immediate alarm, and in France there were profound reactions and imminent danger of a counter-stroke. Hitler accompanied his bold action by a pacificatory speech well baited with an offer of a twenty-five-year pact with France and Belgium, a Western Air Pact and the return of Germany to the League of Nations. The French at once asked for British support in enforcing a withdrawal of the Germans, but were themselves rendered too timorous to act alone, as they might have done with success but for their own internal troubles. Britain, whose interest in the Rhineland was more remote, temporized, pleased at the fleeting vision of twenty-five years of peace and soothed by the cunning device of the proposal to return to the League, voluntarily made by Germany. Whilst prepared to act in defence of the Treaties, her view was that decision should properly be taken by a meeting of the Locarno Powers ; then that it should be deferred to the League Council.

War was very near, but the trick worked, as it had worked before and as it was to succeed again and again until the failure ■ Munich revealed the hollowness of the swindle. The tactics coincided with those employed on other occasions of treaty violation, captivating England with pacific avowals and fascinating the French into temporary inaction. Opinion seized upon the specious vista of prolonged freedom from crisis while the bulwark that guaranteed that freedom was spirited away.

A meeting of the Powers was hastily called in London to consider the French demand that Germany should at once withdraw unconditionally from the Rhine area, but already German fears of swift retaliation were dying away. Ribbentrop, who had stoutly maintained to the Führer before the event that Germany would incur none of the disastrous consequences his other advisers had dismally forecast, could now assure him that once the Powers were gathered in conference instead of proceeding instantly to drastic action, he need have no

further anxiety. The affair would end in brave words and condemnation of Germany, which would do her no harm.

His was no enviable task, having to face the representatives of a dozen nations all angry at Germany's arbitrary move and fearful of what complications might ensue. He had to make the best of a bad case, to excuse a deliberate breach of faith, and to try to confuse the issue by elaborating the pacific nature of the Führer's false promises of future security. The longer he could keep the nations talking, the further would recede the prospects of an enforced withdrawal and a blow to the personal prestige of Hitler from which he might never recover. And Ribbentrop's own political future depended upon the outcome.

First, he had the Locarno Powers to deal with, but there were many comforting factors in the international situation, gravely critical as it was, which might wreck the unanimity of the members, and give him hopes of success. Italy was still smarting under sanctions and was inclined to make the promise of participation depend upon their removal; every nation wanted to find a way out by other means than the use of force, and Britain was far from being unsympathetic to Germany's Rhineland claims. She recognized their inevitability and the right which a State possesses to exercise sovereignty over its own territory. Subject to the reoccupation being defined and regularized, there was a disposition to accept it, provided that acceptance were to be made the basis of a durable peace settlement in Europe.

The proposals communicated to Ribbentrop by the Locarno Powers, Britain, France, Belgium, and Italy, were that Germany should agree that the Franco-Soviet Pact—Hitler's pretext for the re-entry—be submitted to the Court of International Justice; that an international force of British and Italian troops be stationed in the Rhineland pending a final decision; and that during negotiations, Germany should not increase her forces in the area or commence to fortify it. Should these proposals be accepted, discussions would be opened at once to settle the future status of the Rhineland and ■ carry further Hitler's suggestions for a twenty-five-years' plan for peace by the negotiation of mutual assistance pacts against aggression. Moreover, a World Conference should be called to decide upon the limitation of arms, to discuss general security and the settlement of problems of finance and economics, including Germany's demand for colonies.

■ Germany refused to agree to take part in negotiations, or should those negotiations fail, Great Britain and Italy guaran-

teed to support France and Belgium against unprovoked aggression on their frontiers. They also undertook to initiate and to continue with France and Belgium consultations between the respective General Staffs.

Ribbentrop flew back to Berlin, spending the week-end with Hitler in fabricating a reply to these demands. He interpreted correctly the feelings in the British Foreign Office and renewed more confidently than ever his assurances of German immunity from any unpleasant consequences of infraction of the Treaties. Confirmation of his reading of the British view came when the British Ambassador in Berlin began to press upon the German Government the importance of seizing the opportunity to negotiate with the French.

In London again, Ribbentrop declared Germany's readiness to negotiate but flatly rejected the proposal for policing the zone with an international force, refused to agree to the submission of the Franco-Soviet Pact to the Hague Court, and argued that refortification could not in any case take place within the limited period needed for the current negotiations. While he played for time he was holding out the promise of a detailed amplification of Hitler's suggestions and their expansion into a great world-wide scheme for procuring the peace for which everyone longed.

When he came to London for the meeting of the Council, events shaped themselves much as he had predicted. Even amongst Nazis he is unsurpassed as a master in the display of calculated innocence, and now, urbane and smiling, he urged with ingenuous indignation Hitler's indefensible thesis that it was not Germany who had violated Locarno but France, by her Pact with the Soviets.

There was, in reality, no aggressive flavour in the agreement with Russia. The League Council could only take defensive action against an aggressor State if there were no dissentient vote. Consequently, under Locarno, France and Russia might find themselves without timely succour in the event of aggression by another Power. To remedy this defect of the Locarno Treaties, therefore, by the terms of their Pact they had undertaken to go to each other's assistance without waiting for the Council to reach a unanimous decision. Without making any departure from Locarno, the Franco-Soviet Pact did no more than underline the Locarno obligations so far as they were concerned, and it was open to Germany to join in similar defensive agreements for her own security at any time, as Czechoslovakia had done.

Here, there entered the ability of the German to believe

what it suits his argument to believe: the naive conviction, eminently suitable when applied to their own people, that others are so stupid that a reiterated fallacy, vehemently asserted, must be given credence. The Germans have only to say, with enough emphasis and frequency, that they are encircled by enemies and fear aggression to make them think that those who will not cede the point are themselves obtuse and wilful in their blindness. So, although Germany's contention must fail, the Pact was put forward as the excuse for her one-sided breach of the Treaties.

The refusal to agree to submit the matter to the Hague Court showed the weakness of Ribbentrop's case, and the Council, confirming the decision of the Locarno Powers, unanimously recorded their condemnation of the violation. But mere condemnation did not matter to Hitler and Ribbentrop. What they had set out to do they had done. They had taken sovereign possession of the demilitarized zone without incurring retribution. They had checkmated France's demand for the unconditional withdrawal of German troops from the Rhine as a preliminary to any negotiation at all; and they had befogged the nations into discussions about the points of an illusory settlement which they never intended to enter or implement. They had got away with a demonstration of Germany's ability to renounce engagements freely negotiated and subsequently reaffirmed, in respect of which no attempt had been made by Germany for revision by agreement between the signatories. Beyond that, they had succeeded in their prime purpose of rendering themselves almost immune from future French action in support of her allies in Central and Eastern Europe, when Germany would be strong enough to attack them.

March 1936 has been generally and correctly considered as marking the decisive turning-point at which Germany began to apply methods of violence and arbitrariness, hitherto confined to her internal affairs, to her relations with foreign Powers. From that time onwards the measure of trust in the word of Hitler, in the sacredness of solemn undertakings by Germany and in the honesty of German diplomacy, became substantially less. On the day German troops marched into the Rhineland, Hitler had made a speech in Berlin in which he declared his recognition of the unreasonableness of denying Poland access to the sea. He had stated that Germany had no desire to attack Czechoslovakia and Poland. "Above all, Poland will remain Poland and France will remain France. . . . After three years I believe that I can regard the struggle for German

equality as concluded to-day. . . . We have no territorial demands to make in Europe."

Reassuring as these words were, statesmen asked themselves how much reliance could be placed upon declarations made by the man who had just torn up a treaty without making any attempt to ameliorate its provisions by negotiation. So shaken was their confidence in the binding nature of any obligation assumed by Hitler's Germany, so apprehensive of other manifestations of bad faith from the same quarter, that out of the crisis came a result which neither Hitler nor Ribbentrop had foreseen: a closer understanding between France and Britain.

The cumbrous nature of the collective system when attempts to apply sanctions against Italy had been made, caused grave doubts in Great Britain about the effectiveness of the Covenant. Now, the absence of immediate and resolute concerted action in the Rhineland convinced the French that if they were to have any security against Germany at all, the collective guarantee must be supported by a bilateral agreement with Great Britain. The result was that the two nations resurrected their former friendly relationship and entered into an agreement which amounted practically to a military defensive alliance against aggression. Where Hitler and Ribbentrop thought to separate, they contrived a union of even more far-reaching consequence than the benefit they obtained by resuming full control of the Rhineland. Tempted by the plausible offer of a return to the League and allured by the prospect of a long peace, Britain, nevertheless, was not wholly deceived, even when Ribbentrop finally presented a wordy document containing Hitler's amplification of his plan.

This was carefully designed to exhibit an entrancing mirage in which the dreary view of the dispute would be lost to sight. What great hopes for Europe there would have been had these proposals been genuinely and sincerely intended! The use of gas in warfare was to be strictly controlled. Heavy artillery and big tanks were to be abolished in order to lessen the power of attack and increase the effectiveness of the defensive. No bombs were to be dropped on towns twelve miles outside the fighting area. Arms were to be limited and peace was to be secure for twenty-five years. But, week by week more troops drifted into the Rhineland, the building of barracks continued and the construction of fortifications went on apace. And as for the negotiations and the grandiose plan for peace, they fizzled out in full accordance with the intentions of the Führer as the threat of action became remote and the need for

camouflage of the Rhineland innovation became less pressing.

For Ribbentrop the *coup* was a personal triumph as much as for Hitler. His advice had been taken by the Führer against the opinion of the German military and economic experts and in face of the more cautious attitude of the official Foreign Office. He conducted his delaying action in London, when the League members met at St. James's Palace, with marked skill and adroitness without the help of von Hoesch, the German Ambassador. His judgment, both of the unreadiness of the French and British to agree upon immediate retaliatory action and of the favourable state of feeling in England towards Germany, had been abundantly justified, and ■ was but natural that after his return to Berlin, his ascendancy over Hitler, compared with his rivals in the field of foreign politics, should become more pronounced than ever.

Germany had achieved what she had so long and so strenuously sought: the status of full equality and the recovery of prestige. In reality she got more than equality because her man-power was relatively much greater than that of any of her neighbours, including France. The security of the smaller States in the West and in the East was by no means fully guaranteed by their individual strength without alliances. It depended, in the main, upon the ability of France to come to their aid if they were attacked by Germany. And with the remilitarization of the zone half the value of that potential help was dissipated. The re-entry gave Hitler all that he wanted and the chance to make preparations for blackmail in the East.

In England, von Ribbentrop's friendships remained unimpaired, in spite of the difficult and delicate role he had been obliged to assume in trying to justify a step which, when all is said and done, was the breaking of a treaty and an unwarrantable act ■ bad faith on the part of Germany. He had long held the view that an agreement with England could be brought about, and that it was desired by leading men in Great Britain. The British attitude throughout the discussions—insisting at the peak of the crisis that no military action be taken against Germany and that the peace plan should be thoroughly explored—did nothing to lessen this conviction and, in June, he returned with Frau von Ribbentrop, flying over from Berlin in his big Junkers aeroplane. With him were his usual bodyguards, without whom he ventures nowhere. This time, however, his visit was a private one to the Marquess of Londonderry who, like many other people in this country, was striving

for a better understanding with Germany. The idea of an alliance with Britain had always been one of Hitler's obsessions, and Ribbentrop worked hard to realize it until his tactless failure as Ambassador in London converted him into a violent Anglophobe.

Negotiations were still proceeding for regularizing the status in the Rhineland and for exploring the chances of the issue of a general settlement in Europe to replace Locarno, based upon Hitler's proposals. At the beginning of May, the British Government had addressed a questionnaire to Berlin seeking a fuller explanation of his intentions, but, so far, no reply had been received. None has, in fact, ever been vouchsafed—a clear commentary on the sincerity with which they were made. It was probably due to this diplomatic courtesy and to the known intrigues of Ribbentrop at this time against Sir Eric Phipps, the British Ambassador at Berlin, that, although he spent several days in London during his visit, no member of the Foreign Office called upon him. He had even gone so far in private conversations as to mention the names of certain well-known advocates of Anglo-German friendship—amongst others, Lord Mount Temple and Lord Riverdale—who would be more acceptable to Hitler than Sir Eric.

Foreign Office officials, however, had other matters with which to occupy their minds, for the uselessness of a continuance of sanctions against Italy was now apparent, and proposals were made at a meeting of the League later in the month that a pact of non-recognition of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia should replace them. The dropping of sanctions did nothing to appease Signor Mussolini's rancour at British persistence in their application, or his anger against the League for imposing them. Germany, as he said later in a speech announcing the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis, had taken no part in them; and the estrangement between the Western Powers and Italy which the Abyssinian adventure brought about now smoothed the path to that other prerequisite of Hitler's ambitions—an alliance with Italy.

Italy, like Germany, was a "dissatisfied Power" in the post-war period, and the Stresa talks had only brought disappointment to Mussolini over his demand for colonial expansion. It was a question for him whether he could gain more by peaceful means, by remaining on good terms with France and England; or whether the method of brute force in alliance with Germany would not be more effective. There were many reasons which caused him to lean towards Germany: fear of Russian encroachments in the Balkans, his hatred of Com-

munism—more genuine than Hitler's—and now the prospect of Italian supremacy in the Mediterranean which might ensue from the plot, already far advanced, for the overthrow of the Republican Government in Spain.

He had made the Balkan States his special care, and at the time of the assassination of Dr. Dollfuss two years earlier, only his firmness saved Austria from absorption into the Reich. But sanctions coming on top of the Stresa failure, and the possibilities that Nazi diplomacy promised would follow active encouragement of a Nationalist rebellion in Spain, lessened his interest in Austria. An Italo-German alliance would be a decisive check on Russia. More than that: if a Fascist Government were to be established in Spain, there would arise a totalitarian bloc isolating France and cutting her communications by sea with her African possessions. Anglo-French control of the Mediterranean would lapse in favour of Italy and wide vistas of expansion in Tunisia, in Egypt, the Sudan and further into Africa would be opened.

In Austria, Nazi terrorism was at its height and the tension between that country and Germany must soon come to a head, with consequences to the rest of Europe which could not be foretold. Mussolini, deserting his Austrian protégés, advised Schuschnigg, the Chancellor, to come to an arrangement with Germany and to submit to terms which would leave his country independent only in name. Austria could not stand alone without one or other of her powerful neighbours, Italy or Germany; and on July 11th, Schuschnigg signed an agreement whereby vital concessions were made to the Austrian Nazis, Austria retained a shadow of independence and submitted to a pro-Nazi Government subservient to Berlin.

The agreement removed the barrier to a full Italo-German alliance. Mussolini sacrificed Austria by agreeing to the satisfaction of German claims, both on that country and on Czechoslovakia, in order to secure for Italy more tangible advantages elsewhere. Count Ciano came to Berlin in October and held conversations, first with Baron von Neurath and then with Herr Hitler and von Ribbentrop at Berchtesgaden, with the result that the Duce, on November 2nd, announced the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Germany recognized the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, identity of action was proclaimed in support of the rebels in Spain, and both nations agreed upon the exclusion of Russia from any Western Peace Pact to arise out of the ruins of Locarno, the Treaty Hitler had repudiated by his re-entry into the Rhineland. Further, Germany would not return to the



COUNT CIANO SHAKES HANDS WITH HERR  
RIBBENTROP



League until the Powers also recognized Italian sovereignty over Abyssinia. The Balkan States were deprived of Italy's protection and Germany was given a free hand with the Austrians and the Czechs to compel them into dependence upon her. Hitler's object was to detach Czechoslovakia from the Franco-Soviet-Czechoslovakian Pact and thereby render the Franco-Russian alliance ineffectual. And the agreement opened the way to full Italian and German co-operation in Spain in support of a Spanish Fascist regime which would give Mussolini command of the Eastern Mediterranean and allow him to pursue his plan of colonial expansion in Africa.

In the early part of the year, Ribbentrop had been actively engaged in engineering the Spanish civil war through his special Bureau. Months before the meeting in Morocco which was the signal for the start of the fighting, General Sanjurjo—who might have commanded the rebels instead of Franco but for his death in an aeroplane accident in the first week of the rebellion—came to Berlin and arranged through Ribbentrop and Hess the purchase of large quantities of munitions which were conveyed secretly to Spain. Until the Rome-Berlin Axis came into being, Germany, more than Italy, took the major part in instigating rebellion, and Ribbentrop was largely instrumental in procuring the tragedy through the friendship he cultivated with Señor Agramonte, the Republican Government's Ambassador at Berlin. Agramonte, in spite of his official position, listened to the insidious promptings of the Führer's suave adviser, supported by Hitler's personal assurance of unlimited assistance should the parties of the Right in Spain lead a revolt; and entered into a secret intrigue with Ribbentrop against the Government he represented. After the conclusion of the agreement with Germany, Italy became more deeply involved and "volunteers" from both countries, guns, aeroplanes and rifles, poured into Spain in a conflict which is estimated to have cost the lives of close on half a million Spaniards.

Another of Ribbentrop's friendships which proved to be useful to Hitler about this time was with the Japanese military attaché at Berlin, General Oshima. During the summer Ribbentrop, who had been assiduous in his attentions to Oshima, brought him to Berchtesgaden for conversations with Hitler, Goering and von Dircksen, the German Ambassador to Tokyo. The result of the meeting was a secret arrangement with Japan for a definition of interests in the Far East and, contingent upon Japanese confirmation, a military alliance. By the time ratification of the proposals was received from

Tokyo, Ribbentrop had taken up his position as Ambassador to the Reich in London and he returned to Berlin to affix his signature to the Treaty as "the centralizer of the German effort against Communism." On November 25th, the foreign ambassadors in Berlin were called to the Wilhelmstrasse to receive notification that the Anti-Comintern Pact had been signed by Viscount Mutsukoshi and General Oshima, on behalf of Japan, and von Ribbentrop on behalf of Germany.

Ribbentrop stated that the object of the Pact was "to collaborate in the destruction of international Communism" and endeavoured to explain it by asserting that it was aimed at the Third International and the spreading of world revolution, rather than at the U.S.S.R. In support of this tenuous distinction he referred to official pronouncements from Moscow that "the Third International and the Soviet are two separate and distinct entities."

There were at once violent reactions in Moscow and increased tension everywhere. Russia proceeded to expand her armaments to colossal dimensions and Japan replied with a Budget providing for greatly increased estimates for her army and navy. Litvinoff, the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, declared in a speech to the Soviet Congress that "the Red Army and Navy will have to defend the Fatherland. . . . The Soviet will beat back the waves of the filthy Fascist Sea." Dr. Goebbels in a broadcast claimed that the Japanese "are the yellow branch of the Aryan tree."

But in spite of Ribbentrop's explanations of the innocent intention behind the Pact, there were grave apprehensions in other capitals besides Moscow as to its true meaning. Its bearing on British interests in the East could not be lightly regarded: a contingency which Hitler had foreseen. It was intended that other nations in Europe should adhere to the Pact, and it was said that, without such adherence, Germany would countenance no new Western Peace Pact. Britain must, in Hitler's view, be won over to concurrence, and with this in mind, he had decided while negotiations with Japan were still in progress in the summer, to send his special adviser on Foreign Affairs, von Ribbentrop, to London as Ambassador charged with the mission of bringing about a better understanding of German aims.

Germany had been without an Ambassador in London ever since the death of Leopold von Hoech in April, and speculations as to the identity of his successor had been rife in Berlin for some time. It was not thought likely that the Führer would spare so useful a collaborator as Ribbentrop and he was,

indeed, very reluctant to part with him. Hitler, however, attached so much importance to Anglo-German relations in view of future developments to arise out of the agreements with Japan and Italy and the difficulties that would certainly ensue from Germany's interference with Spanish concerns, that in the middle of August he gave his assent to the appointment. By this time Ribbentrop himself was so deeply immersed in the affairs of his Nazi Bureau and was so self-conscious of his indispensability to Hitler that he no longer wanted the appointment. He would have been better contented if his rival, von Neurath, had been preferred, or if Rosenberg had been chosen. But Rosenberg had ruined his chance when, on a visit to London, he had been so lacking in tact as to raise a storm of criticism by placing a wreath bearing a large swastika on the Cenotaph. The British Legion protested and the offending emblem was removed, but his action had been followed by so many adverse comments that his selection was not thereafter considered.

The claims of Neurath were more substantial, for his transfer from Berlin to London would have ended the persistent friction between the Foreign Office and the Bureau, and he had already held the same post for two years during Brüning's Chancellorship. Ribbentrop, moreover, did not relish the thought that by becoming Ambassador he would be serving under his rival and be subject to his directions, instead of occupying a position at least the equal of, and often overriding that of, the Foreign Minister; a position, too, which brought him daily into contact with his Führer. And there was the all-important question of what would happen to the Bureau, whose staff now comprised about forty subordinate diplomats and experts. His personal objections, however, must be forgotten in face of the imperative need of securing the friendship of Britain, her adherence to the anti-Bolshevik front and a blind eye to the doings of Germany in Central Europe.

The appointment was welcomed in Berlin by his enemies, because they imagined that his removal from his advisory position with Hitler was tantamount to a victory for von Neurath and the men of moderate opinions to whose views he had run counter in the more venturesome advice which he had often pressed upon the Führer. There were many, too, who were jealous of his rapid promotion and of his close friendship with Hitler: older men like von Papen—now restored to favour through his progress in undermining the Austrian Government—and men who had spent most of their lives in

diplomacy and could not be expected to show any enthusiasm for the elevation of an amateur to the premier German Embassy. But dislike of the occupant was not all caused by jealousy ; Ribbentrop was now beginning to suffer from the effects of success, his manner markedly supercilious and overbearing. He had to his credit his acute judgment of French and British reactions ■ the Rhineland *coup*, the quick conclusion of the London Naval Agreement, which the Ambassador in London, von Hoesch, had not even been asked to sign : the progress of negotiations with Japan and with the Spanish Nationalists. And there were few failures to record as yet, although he had certainly blundered badly in Belgium earlier in the year.

Belgian opinion had for some time been veering towards neutrality, and the Rexist Movement under Degrelle had made great strides. Anti-French feeling was increasingly evident in many quarters, and Ribbentrop's enthusiasm and lack of experience caused him to rush in where a trained diplomat would have made a more cautious approach. Advised by his observers of the new trend in Belgian policy, he went to Brussels and opened conversations with members of the Government. Unfortunately for the success of his mission, the Government discovered that he had also used the occasion of his visit to get into touch with the leaders of the discontented Flemish-Germans in Eupen-Malmédy, the territory which had been ceded to Belgium under the Versailles Treaty. Such wiles were strongly resented by the Belgians as well as by the Flemings, and Ribbentrop, accused of double-crossing by both sides, returned crestfallen to Berlin to receive the severe admonitions of Hitler.

In London the appointment was regarded as an indication of Hitler's peaceful intentions, and hopes for the success of the new Locarno Conference, which would shortly begin its deliberations, were considerably strengthened. During the naval talks the previous year, and at both the meetings which followed the Rhineland crisis, Ribbentrop had made a favourable impression ; and from their frequent contacts with him, Ministers had formed a higher opinion ■ his personal goodwill towards England than his later acts of bad faith would now justify. At all events, he was sure of their co-operation in any policy which would relieve the tension in Europe caused by repeated Nazi threats of unprovoked aggression and lead to a genuine understanding.

He was on holiday in England when he received notification of his appointment and hurried back to Berlin to settle the fate

of his Bureau. There were many matters of importance, too, in which he was deeply involved, which he could not immediately forsake until they had been carried further. There was the proposed Five-Power Conference for a general European settlement; the Spanish affair, now only three weeks old, and the negotiations with Japan. In the end, although the appointment was made on August 11th, so long did it take him to wind up his affairs in Berlin that he did not come to London to present his credentials until the end of October, and many were the speculations as to the cause of the long delay.

The principal reason was his concern about what would happen to his Nazi Bureau for Foreign Affairs: his own pet creation which he was unwilling to see merged into the Foreign Office of Neurath, or dispersed. In the end the Führer agreed that its existence should be preserved and that the new ambassador should continue to direct it, flying over from London to Berlin in his private aeroplane whenever his presence should be required either in connection with its activities or to give advice as Hitler's right-hand man in Franco-German and Anglo-German affairs. Herr Woermann, chief of the European Department in the Wilhelmstrasse and a Minister Plenipotentiary, was made Counsellor of the London Embassy so that, during the expected absences of the ambassador, he might act as envoy with full powers. Thus the maintenance of Ribbentrop's dual position as the Führer's principal adviser and as ambassador was preserved.

In the last week of October he set out for London, dressed in Brownshirt uniform and accompanied by Frau von Ribbentrop and his family. He brought an imposing entourage with him: more than forty persons, including minor diplomats from his own Bureau, secretaries, typists and the inevitable Black Guards, with five cars and an aeroplane.

He came to England on a mission of professed friendship which had every prospect of success, depending only upon his genuineness and Hitler's. Every other portent was favourable. He appeared to be frank and sincere; there was no language difficulty and he was socially acceptable and known to be an excellent host. He had many friends in England in high places ready to sponsor him and, above all, he came with the immense advantage of his close personal friendship with Hitler to help him in accurately presenting his views. With England ready and anxious to collaborate in building up a system of peace and security in Europe, ■ needed only willingness on the part of Germany, and here was Ribbentrop's opportunity to further

that cause. But the end of Ribbentrop's stay at the Court of St. James found relations between the two countries more strained than when he arrived—a failure which was caused as much by his tactless indiscretions, his arrogance and stupidity and his misunderstanding of the mentality of the British, as by the fanatic inconstancy of his master.

What would have been an ingredient of certain success in a man of greater integrity and loftier ideals—that close friendship with Hitler—to a great extent was Ribbentrop's undoing. He had earned the enmity of a majority of Hitler's other powerful advisers in the inner circle of the Nazis, and depended for his advancement upon retaining the good opinion and esteem of one man alone—the Führer. Ambitions and vain, ■ cared more for his career than for anything else, and for that reason his actions must be shaped to please Hitler rather than advance the just solution of a problem. Whether it were right or wrong, he would do nothing to forfeit Hitler's goodwill, which had raised him in a very few years from being a political nonentity to supremacy over all the other ambassadors of the Reich, as Ambassador-at-Large and head of the Nazi Foreign Office.

Before he left Berlin, the British Ambassador gave a dinner-party at the Embassy to bid him farewell. In London the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, presiding at a dinner given in honour of the visit of German ex-servicemen in the cause of Anglo-German friendship, said that he knew that Hitler hated war from the bottom of his heart. Thus was created the right atmosphere of peace and goodwill, of good augury for the outcome of the new ambassador's mission. The Führer's consideration for him, too, had removed at least one obstacle to an auspicious beginning, for the day before he should have left Berlin, he had attended a momentous conference at Berchtesgaden at which it was decided to recognize the Italian conquest of Abyssinia. This was bound to cause keenest irritation and resentment in London and would come as a veritable cold douche after the warmth of the welcome which would be accorded to Ribbentrop in the midst of the harmony aroused by the fraternization of the members ■ the British and German Legions. The bombshell had better be exploded at once and his departure delayed a few days, so that the act of recognition would be an accomplished fact when he arrived and he would be spared the storm ■ was certain to provoke. So the *communiqué* announcing it was issued before he left Berlin and the smoke of the explosion had already begun to disperse before he arrived in London.

Reaching Victoria on October 26th, Freiherr Joachim von Ribbentrop, ambassador of the German Reich to the Court of St. James, handed to the waiting pressmen a transcription ■ the short address which he then delivered. Instead of confining himself ■ a friendly declaration of Germany's good-will, he plunged headlong into controversy. At once he made it clear that he would regard it as his duty to open Britain's eyes to the danger of Communism and to convince the public of this country that Hitler was their champion in the fight against Bolshevism. "The Führer is convinced that there ■ only one real danger to Europe and to the British Empire as well; that is, the spreading further of Communism, that most terrible of all diseases. . . ."

His wish for our friendship was but "cupboard" love, just as his detestation of Bolshevism was assumed to serve a sinister purpose. He was out to destroy the Franco-Soviet Pact and he wanted our friendship so that France would be alienated from us and isolated. But, delivering a reprimand and preaching a sermon to England the moment he set foot in London seemed an odd way to begin his wooing.

## CHAPTER X

### RIBBENTROP'S BLUNDERS AS AMBASSADOR IN LONDON

THE new ambassador's ill-timed address immediately on arrival was not merely an isolated indiscretion which might be excused on the ground of lack of experience, or even a typically Teutonic misconception of the usages of diplomacy. This was the fourth time during the year that he had come to England, his other visits having been made as Hitler's Ambassador-at-Large. A trifling *faux pas* would have been readily overlooked in the general desire to welcome him and give him every encouragement as a harbinger of peace and international accord. But his subsequent proceedings left no room for doubt in the mind of anyone with whom he came in contact that he regarded himself as being charged with a mission to lecture the British people on the error of their ways and show them their political follies.

The English news broadcast from Berlin the next morning praised him for his attack on Bolshevism and went on to say that the main purpose of his appointment was to convince Britain of the deadliness of the menace from Moscow. It was, therefore, more than an indiscretion ; it was the opening of a campaign. Two days later, General Goering exhorted Germans to endure sacrifices and privations to ensure the success of his Four Year Plan. His words were a direct threat to Britain as she greeted Germany's ambassador.

"We possess no colonies," he roared. "They were stolen from us after an unfortunate war (loud and prolonged cheers). We are told to buy raw materials with gold. We would be ready to do so if all our gold had not been stolen from us. . . . England owns one-third of the world in colonies and Germany nothing."

And as if Ribbentrop's and Goering's provocations were not enough, Dr. Goebbels announced that "Germany will, course, take up the fight for her colonies."

Ribbentrop was in England, then, with a twofold purpose : to claim the return of the former German colonial possessions

and to induce Great Britain to join with Germany in a fight against the Soviets.

This truculent oratory, and particularly Ribbentrop's excess of anti-Communist zeal, called forth an immediate reproof from Sir Austen Chamberlain in the *Daily Telegraph*. He declared that it was indeed unfortunate that Ribbentrop's first words on landing on our shores should have coupled the expression of goodwill to England with an invitation to regard another Power as the common enemy. He hoped that the speech was no more than "an unpremeditated indiscretion." He deplored also the violent harangues of Goering and Goebbels and pointed out that it was on a mission of friendship that Ribbentrop was come. "England is cast by General Goering for the role of Public Enemy No. 1. Which is the authentic voice of the German people?" he asked. And Mr. Eden, speaking in the House of Commons on friendship with Germany, summed up the policy of Great Britain. There were two conditions which were inevitably attached to any friendship this country could proffer to any other country: that such friendship could not be exclusive nor could it be directed against anyone else.

The German newspapers, despite the rigorous censorship, published Sir Austen's article in full, either because of the personal enmity existing between the Propaganda Minister and Ribbentrop; or, more probably, directly on the instructions of the Führer, who had sent him to London to make friends, not to antagonize feeling at the very outset.

Nevertheless, in spite of a bad beginning, he met with a cordial reception in the right quarters and was hailed as the new "lion" of Mayfair. He had the reputation ■ being a "lady's man," and, socially and politically, every door was opened wide to Hitler's good-looking young envoy with the perfect manners and the disarming smile. ■ he were come to seek the goodwill of England in a real attempt at a lasting understanding, the opportunity was freely offered. But more indiscretions followed quickly and within a week Mr. Eden, speaking in the House of Commons, found it necessary to remind him that Great Britain, more than any other nation, had helped Germany on the road to recovery. That, however, did not deter the ambassador from announcing two weeks later his firm conviction that the countries which did not yet appreciate the Bolshevik danger would one day be on their knees to the Führer thanking him for having recognized clearly and in good time the menace to the world. How ludicrous that must seem now to the Finns and the Poles!

He lost no time in presenting his letters of credence to the King, as "Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary from the Republic of Germany." As is customary, the Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps accompanied him and he was introduced by the Foreign Secretary. But here again, through excessive zeal as a Nazi, he committed what can only be considered a gross breach of ceremonial etiquette. In place of the usual bows before the Sovereign, he advanced smartly, thrust out his arm in the Nazi salute and in a loud voice uttered the words: *Heil Hitler!*

His Majesty, of course, displayed no outward sign of surprise, but this impolitic departure from established precedent was widely resented and gave rise to some well-merited rebukes in the Press. Ribbentrop, however, was curiously unconscious of having sinned by parading the florid gesture in the august presence. He attributed the expressions of anger to the hostility which he thought he must expect from a nation jealous of Germany's resurgence and Hitler's achievements—not all to his own stupidity.

For a long time he remained impervious to the criticisms levelled at him, for he thought that by giving the salute he would curry favour with the Nazi extremists in Berlin. On the next occasion of ceremony, King George's first levée at St. James's Palace, he repeated the *gaucherie*. This time, however, the salute was modified by the omission of *Heil Hitler*, but it was enough to provoke a further flood of comment and eventually the matter was investigated by the Protocol Department of the German Foreign Office. "Peterborough," in the *Daily Telegraph*, evoked a vision of the Soviet ambassador in Berlin following the precedent and brandishing a clenched fist before Herr Hitler; while another writer recalled the visit of a coloured potentate who was received by Queen Victoria. In accordance with the polite custom of his own country, this dark-skinned despot was said to have prostrated himself and knocked his head thrice upon the floor, yet no one raised any objection to so convincing a method of showing respect for Her Majesty.

The real objection to the salute lay in its over-assertiveness. It is not a gesture of respect at all, but a provocation; and if Britain were ever to become totalitarian, it is highly improbable that her diplomats would be instructed to shout "Rule Britannia" as a greeting to the head of another nation. In itself the flaunting of the salute might have been regarded as no more than imprudent: a want of taste. But taken in conjunction with Ribbentrop's unusual political and propagand-

ist activities, it assumed a greater importance and seemed to indicate an absence of due deference in the presence of the King. Some members wanted to raise the matter in the House of Commons, but questions about it were not encouraged on the ground that formal ventilation of the affair in Parliament could only be a hindrance to what everyone hoped for: an improvement in our relations with Germany.

Eventually, even Ribbentrop saw the light and sought permission from Berlin to dispense with the salute by conforming to custom. This was granted on Hitler's instructions, but out-and-out Nazis in Germany remained stubbornly unconvinced. Of such is the kingdom of Hitler. The Press of Berlin took the matter up, retorting that Herr von Ribbentrop "greeted the head of the British State with the German greeting, an act of special honour which no well-meaning person could misunderstand." And some of his pro-German English friends protested that the comments in England were both exaggerated and unfair. Nevertheless, the next time Ribbentrop greeted the King, he refrained, giving the three bows traditional in Court etiquette.

In spite of these initial blunders, he was still in favour with a large number of influential people in England, particularly amongst the aristocracy, which seemed to be almost equally divided between those who inclined to a *rapprochement* with France and those who favoured an attempt at an understanding with her former enemy. Commercial interests in London, too, were deeply imbued with a dread of Communism and appeared ready to accept Ribbentrop's view of the Führer as the potential saviour of the world from the Bolshevik menace.

There is no doubt that an alliance with Germany could have been attained at any time during the several years which preceded Ribbentrop's elevation to the office of Foreign Minister in February 1938; and many politicians and public men in this country, whose motives could not be questioned, were in favour of a pro-German policy. Lord Rothermere had written strongly in opposition to the assumption of a special responsibility by Britain in conjunction with France with regard to the dangerous problem of Danzig, in which, he said, this country had no direct concern whatever. Under the heading "Get together with Germany," he urged that a *Pax Germanica-Britannica* would be a guarantee of world peace such as Geneva could never give.

In October 1935, the Anglo-German Fellowship—counterpart of the new *Deutsche-Englische Gesellschaft* and a project for which Ribbentrop was largely responsible—was in-

corporated. In December the inaugural dinner was held, at which Lord Mount Temple proposed the toast of Anglo-German friendship. Its founders included prominent British industrialists : Mr. D'Arcy Cooper, the chairman of Unilever Ltd., Mr. Ernest Tennant, and the former Inter-Allied Commissioner at Cologne during the occupation. By the time Ribbentrop became ambassador, it had become a powerful factor in forming opinion in favour of Germany. One of the earliest functions he attended after coming to London was a dinner given by the Fellowship to welcome him, at which the Marquess of Londonderry, a former Air Minister, was the principal speaker. Amongst the seven hundred distinguished guests were Lord Lothian, later at the Washington Embassy, the Duke of Wellington, Lord Redesdale, Lord Arnold, Lord Davies, and many prominent Members of Parliament.

Sir Ian Hamilton had been to Germany and had returned convinced of the pacific intentions of the Führer. Lord Londonderry who, perhaps unjustifiably, has been singled out as the target for most of the strictures passed upon those who at this time believed that Britain would gain by German friendship, had visited Ribbentrop several times in Berlin, and a return visit to Ireland had been paid by Ribbentrop during the summer. Society hostesses vied with each other in giving political parties for the friends of Germany, or for the exponents of a French *entente*.

Now, von Ribbentrop had come to London to focus all these pro-German enthusiasms into one great effort to bring Britain into an agreement with his country. What, then, was the basis of the proposed alliance ?

A free hand for Germany in Central Europe ; recognition of existing British interests and German confirmation of her colonial possessions ; a united front against Bolshevism. It was to be an alliance against France and against Russia, with both of whom we were on friendly terms—and an alliance meaningless which does not contemplate war, in Hitler's view. Our possessions would be secure, but could we trust Germany under Hitler, when " the free hand in Europe " had grasped its prizes and added mightily to German strength and resources ? Britain was to exchange her idealism for the *realismus* of Germany, desert her friends and watch Hitler, or even help him, while he despoiled the little States. Even in 1936, at the Anti-Bolshevist Exhibition at Munich, there was displayed a huge map showing the Bolshevik States. Thereon Czechoslovakia was ominously coloured the same bright red as Soviet Russia.

In the exalted circles ■ which Ribbentrop moved, not all the politicians and statesmen guarding the destinies ■ the British Empire succumbed to his advances. Amongst the seven hundred who welcomed him at the dinner of the Anglo-German Fellowship in December 1936, neither Sir Austen Chamberlain, whose Locarno Pact Hitler had renounced, nor Mr. Neville Chamberlain, neither Mr. Eden nor Mr. Churchill, was numbered. With smiling complacency, von Ribbentrop sought the sympathy of his audience by his propaganda on behalf of Germany. "Germany," he said, "wants again to be a nation able to pursue her daily work without being constantly pre-occupied by cares due to lack of the necessities ■ life. The Four Years Plan is one step in this direction. But Herr Hitler sees now, as before, in the return of the colonies desired for the supply ■ raw materials only, and in world trade, two most essential means of raising the standard of life of his people from the present subsistence level. A reasonable solution of the colonial problem is most essential.

"England and Germany have had only one conflict in their long history of friendly relations and this was a terrible and tragic mistake which must never be repeated. There would be no winner in the long run. We all know to-day that another conflict between our two nations, another universal world war, would mean the unavoidable victory of world revolution, Bolshevism, and destruction of everything dear to us for generations."

The German Ambassador was warming up to his task and by pointing to the probable consequences of conflict, he was propounding war as the alternative to the satisfaction of Germany's claims. Britain must be estranged from France, join in the fight against Soviet Russia, or be made to restore the lost colonies. Only ■ we refused to become allied with Germany, so that we should hold the fort while she ravaged the nations ■ Europe, would the claim for colonies be enforced, but Goering, Goebbels and Ribbentrop alike left us in no two minds about the consequences of that refusal. And during all the time of his stay in England, Ribbentrop harped on two themes, anti-Bolshevism and Colonies, with scarce a variation.

In *Mein Kampf* Hitler renounced any aspirations for a German Colonial Empire, nor did he show much concern over the question of the return of overseas territories until, in 1936, he saw how valuable persistent clamour for them might be if used as a demand to be relinquished in exchange for other concessions dearer to the Nazi heart. Raise the colonial question to the status of a major issue, concomitant with

some other more vital claim ; then be ready to forgo the demand in order to secure the recognition of the real objective —that, in all probability, represented the later attitude of Hitler.

But there were many in Germany who had made no such renunciation, and in the case of Hitler, it would be a bold man who would say that a claim renounced is withdrawn for ever. Even during the last few months of peace he told the British Ambassador at Berlin that colonies could wait four, six, or even ten years. Led by General von Epp, President of the *Reichskolonialbund* ; Hjalmar Schacht, one of whose tasks ■ to find finance for purchases abroad ; General Goering, whose Four Year Plan was inaugurated because Germany has no colonial resources of raw materials ; and Dr. Heinrich Schnee, ■ one time Governor of German East Africa, the demand for restitution was put in the forefront of the Nazi programme and began to be pursued with increasing violence. Hitler now adopted it, much as a scientist uses an irritant for producing the serum to cure some other ill. Thus was the compliant Ribbentrop instructed to press the claim in England, blandly impervious to all the irritation he caused and the damage to the main purpose of his friendly mission. And when it is considered how little time he spent in London—for he was continually flying back to Berlin on one pretext or another—it is the more astonishing that he could crowd into such short periods of time so many affronts and provocations.

At the end of November, when his appointment was nearly five months old, he had spent barely three weeks in London. Fears became general that his somewhat sporadic attentions to his ambassadorial duties would lead to a danger of his Government being misinformed about the vital questions ■ issue with Great Britain. A case in point was the guarantee that if Belgium were attacked she could count upon armed assistance from Britain, voiced by Mr. Eden at a luncheon to M. van Zeeland, the Belgian Premier. The pledge applied also to the Low Countries and to France, but von Ribbentrop's frequent absences and the dissipation of his energies resulting from the dual role of ambassador and Hitler's principal adviser, led to doubts being felt in Germany about the extent ■ the guarantee.

It was said that at no time was Germany worse informed. "To-day," the *Manchester Guardian* commented, "Germany has not even got an ambassador in the full sense of the word for it is only by a kind of fiction that Herr von Ribbentrop enjoys that title to the full. An ambassador who is here only by fits and starts, who is more concerned to teach this country

what its policy ought to be than to inform himself what its policy is ; who, in addition to his special activity as a leading functionary in the National-Socialist Party, ■ one of the principal promoters of a semi-romantic, semi-serious holy war against what he imagines to be Communism—such an emissary can hardly be called an ambassador in the ordinary sense of that term. . . . The gravity of the danger is evident. It may or may not be true that Germany would have refrained from invading Belgium in 1914 had she known what the British attitude was to be. But that absolute clearness as to the British attitude now is essential needs no demonstration."

Back again to Berlin light-heartedly went von Ribbentrop in December, spending Christmas there and returning better primed than ever with arguments for the return of the colonies and for a crusade against the Bolsheviks. At the end of January he launched a bitter attack on the Franco-Soviet Pact which, after all, was a purely defensive alliance against possible aggression—contrasting it with the Anglo-German Naval Agreement which he had negotiated. He asked who had done more for the stabilization of peace. Was it a country which concluded guarantees of peace with its neighbours—by which, of course, he meant Germany—or the country which concluded military alliances with countries bordering on the back of its neighbours ? Again he urged Great Britain into an unholy alliance of aggression and desertion by asserting that in the future, as in the past, Germany would "continue on the road of amicable agreements with every nation willing to come to an understanding."

Amicable agreements ! Read what he said about peace in an interview reported in *Il Popolo d'Italia* : "The democracies know that Mussolini and Hitler want peace, but if they are not left alone let the democracies remember that these two men, with their peoples, are invincible. There is nothing new in our military alliance, but for those half-baked, pettifogging and carping jurists, it is just as well that the 'i' should be dotted."

In Ribbentrop's own words, by that alliance, effective for ten years, both parties were bound to support each other should either be forced to go to war, "with all military forces on land, ■ sea, and in the air." In case of war, both countries undertook to make no separate armistice or peace unless both are agreed as to terms.

Ribbentrop is a hard worker and a man of unbounded energy, and it would be unfair to infer from his absences from his post that he was guilty of any avoidable neglect of his diplomatic

duties. He went over to Berlin again ■ the end of January, scarcely a month after his last visit ; but his visits were necessary because he was still Hitler's adviser on foreign affairs. Now he had been made his chief exponent of German colonial aspirations. His task was to make these aspirations known in London and to advise the Führer on the steps necessary to be taken, and just how far he could venture in twisting the lion's tail, while keeping in mind the main objective ■ Anglo-German goodwill. Unfortunately for the cause, his judgment in this matter was far from being shrewd, measured by the snarls uttered by the lion.

Intervention in Spain was the menace to European peace at the time and the question of the immediate adoption of measures to prevent the despatch of volunteers, strongly urged by Great Britain, was frequently discussed between Ribbentrop and Mr. Eden, or sometimes Lord Halifax. Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the principle of non-intervention had been agreed upon by the Powers, including Germany, Italy and Russia, the three whose continued intervention was causing most of the difficulties. But still the traffic in arms went on almost unchecked, and besides the tens of thousands of Italian soldiers masquerading as volunteers, Russian aeroplanes and money and German munitions found their way into Spain. Towards a solution of the problem Ribbentrop contributed but little, readily affirming the principle, but never bringing Germany whole-heartedly into any practical scheme of effective collaboration.

When he returned from Berlin at the beginning of February, he came charged with instructions to press the colonial issue and obtain from the Foreign Office some tangible indication as to how far Britain would go towards giving Germany satisfaction. The moment was unpropitious, for Mr. Baldwin was shortly about to resign the Premiership in favour of Mr. Chamberlain, and Ribbentrop was strongly advised by his friends in London not to make immediate demands. He should content himself for the time by merely taking soundings, as Mr. Baldwin was not likely to commit himself in any way which might embarrass his successor. Any risk of too forthright a declaration of British policy, however, was providentially removed by the absence of the Foreign Secretary in the South ■ France when, early in the month, Ribbentrop called at the Foreign Office. Lord Halifax acted as deputy and informed him that in any case before changes could even be considered, the Dominions would have to be consulted. While regarding their acquiescence as improbable, he suggested that

Germany should embody her claims in an agenda for negotiating a general settlement of conditions in Europe—a matter which the German Foreign Office and the evasiveness of Ribbentrop had contrived to postpone for nearly a year.

The interview, and Ribbentrop's persistent references to colonies, led to a question being asked in the House of Commons whether the Government would state that they could not contemplate the cession of any territory whatsoever; to which the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Lord Cranborne, replied: "The Government have not considered and are not considering such a question."

Rumours now began to circulate freely, both in London and Berlin, of Ribbentrop's retirement from the Embassy through disappointment at his failure to achieve either of the two main objects of his appointment, namely, an Anglo-German understanding and an agreement in regard to colonies. Certainly he had made no progress in either direction in spite of the confident assurances he had given the Führer. More than that: it was now clear that, through his lack of perception and his misunderstanding of the opinions and mentality of the British whose friendship he wooed, the chances of agreement were still more remote than they had been at any time during the months following the Rhineland crisis. He had complained bitterly to Lord Halifax of the attitude of the Press towards him, which, he said, made his work difficult, not realizing that the reaction in the Press was the natural outcome of his own maladroitness.

He had reduced his staff of forty-four at the Embassy to nearly half that number, but was making vast alterations to the reception-rooms in Carlton House Terrace which would permit him to entertain a thousand guests at one time. To help in the reconstruction he imported no less than 120 German workmen, an innovation which did not add to his popularity and was certainly contrary to the normal practice of foreign ambassadors. Resentment at his unusual activities was steadily mounting as he went from one blunder to another. There was strong objection to his subterranean attempts to get some known Germanophile appointed to the British Embassy at Berlin in place of Sir Eric Phipps, who had gone to Paris. Equally evident was the disquiet in diplomatic circles over his pronounced propagandist enterprises; he was no longer *persona grata* with Ministers and it became abundantly clear to everyone except himself that he was ignorant of the usual practice of the Court of St. James. There was disquiet amongst Ministers because he was constantly in the society of

leading Conservatives outside the Government, whose avowed object was to establish an Anglo-German alliance on an anti-French and anti-Russian basis. But there were yet worse *faux pas* still to come, and Ribbentrop, serenely unconscious of his own egregious failings, blamed what he took to be the natural stupidity of the people whom his antics were rapidly estranging for his unpopularity.

A week after his interview with Lord Halifax, he was invited to visit Lord Derby at Knowsley Hall and to meet the chiefs of the Lancashire cotton industry at a dinner at Manchester.

Behind Lord Derby's invitation lay a kindly intention to explain to Ribbentrop ■ friendly fashion that his own ill-judged actions and untimely utterances were the cause of his unpopularity; that it was making matters difficult for the Foreign Office, which was unable to prevent, either in the House of Commons, or outside it, criticism of an ambassador in a country with free institutions. The remedy, he was told, lay in his own hands. It was rumoured that the opportunity was also taken by Lord Derby, as one possessing an unique position in England, to impress upon his guest the immensity of the programme of rearmament which was now well under way in Britain and the determination of the Government to see it through.

Even an everyday affair such as this visit could not be allowed to pass without Ribbentrop contriving to take a false step, though one of trifling importance. For some obscure reason he found it necessary to hide his identity on the train journey to Knowsley, and travelled incognito as "Mr. Smith," causing wider publicity to be given to his movements than if he had booked his compartment in the name ■ Herr von Ribbentrop; for a Lancashire Socialist member named Smith referred to the ruse in the House. Not quite so artless, however, was his action when on a visit to Winyard Park, Lord Londonderry's home in Durham. His host related to the author an incident which occurred when he took Ribbentrop to a service at the cathedral. He was given a place in the choir stalls, and, when the other worshippers stood, he asserted his Nazism by obstinately remaining seated throughout the whole of the service.

His return from Lancashire coincided with the completion of the reconstruction of the Embassy and, whether or not as a result of Lord Derby's friendly advice, Frau von Ribbentrop signalized the event by giving a party to the workmen who had laboured on the alterations. German and English workmen to the number of three or four hundred were invited and

regaled with nearly as many hundreds of gallons of beer—an occasion which seemed to be the first practical attempt to achieve that understanding with the British people which the ambassador so keenly desired. And if Ribbentrop had, in fact, sought friendship in circles less exalted but more in touch with real opinion in the country, he might have been better able to inform his Führer and so avoid the mistakes and misjudgments which marked his mission to London and have since misled Germany.

Mr. Eden had now returned from the South of France and, in a talk with Ribbentrop on the subject of a Western Pact, tried to induce him to clarify Hitler's attitude. In November, Britain had sent a note to Berlin containing proposals for the long-delayed peace discussions, but no reply had been vouchsafed on the spurious pretext that affairs in Spain obscured the situation in Europe. Beginning at last to lose patience, the Foreign Office had bluntly requested Ribbentrop to furnish a reply, with the result that he now produced a long and involved document which took the matter no further. Belgium had decided to depart from participation in a military defensive alliance with France and Britain. Nevertheless, the latter had given a guarantee of armed assistance in case of attack. This was the real reason for German procrastination and the vagueness of the reply, Nazi diplomacy seeking to turn the situation in Belgium to Germany's advantage.

But the cause of the failure to find a basis for any discussion of European peace lay deeper still in the fundamental difference between British and German policy. Britain maintained that no concessions could be made, whether as to colonies or anything else, and no agreement reached, unless it were part of a comprehensive scheme for a settlement in Europe. Whereas the German view expounded by Ribbentrop was that Germany would take no part in any plan which included Russia as a party, and that a settlement in Western Europe and an Anglo-German understanding should be concluded independently of the co-operation of the Central and Eastern States. With Hitler merely waiting for events to take a turn to the disadvantage of Britain or France, or favourable to Germany, in Spain, or elsewhere, there was no chance of reconciling differences, and the last thing Hitler wanted, or Ribbentrop strove for, was a general settlement which would ensure the peace of Europe. By them, all the troubles afflicting the nations were attributed to the encouragement given by Britain to the Franco-Soviet Pact. And the sole object of that Pact was the maintenance of peace in the East.

Meantime, colonial demands were being advanced with increasing vigour in Germany. The *Kölnische Zeitung* regretted that British opinion had not been persuaded by Dr. Schacht and Herr von Ribbentrop that a solution on the basis of "sure access to raw materials" without territorial ownership would not suffice. It declared that Germany had again and again expressed a wish for an understanding, especially in regard to Great Britain: by the Naval Agreement, by giving her adherence to the Convention on submarine warfare "and by sending Ambassador von Ribbentrop to London."

At the beginning of March Ribbentrop again paid a visit to Germany, making a speech at the Leipzig Fair which aroused a storm of indignation in England. Therein he adduced three reasons for Germany's colonial demands: the necessity for the addition of territories providing sources for the supply of raw materials that could be paid for in German money; the need of a market for Germany's industrial products, and the modern possibilities for the development of colonies which hitherto had rendered their possession by Germany of small importance. "Germany, once one of the richest countries in the world, has been put among the 'have-nots' by Versailles. An all-round inequality has been created which cannot last for ever. . . . A remedy must be found, either by the return of the colonies or by the German people's own strength. It was only the trust in President Wilson's promises which induced the German people to lay down their arms. Germany demands the right to colonies on principle, a right which is due to every other nation."

Mr. L. S. Amery, a former Colonial Secretary, described the speech as being "unpleasantly like an undated ultimatum." In the House of Commons the Government was asked whether representations would be made "as to the undesirability of the German Ambassador indulging in political activities inconsistent with his special diplomatic position." German diplomats expressed their dismay at this new affront and blamed it, equally with his earlier indiscretions, for his failure to secure Anglo-German accord. From Berlin came an official warning to be more tactful and not on any account to give the Nazi salute.

His attitude was clear enough. The English were too slow, too stupid to understand the significance of National-Socialism. To explain it to them with mild words and courteous phrases was a waste of time. If they were to be made to realize the greatness and power of the new Germany of Hitler, they must be thundered at, threatened, shaken

roughly out of their complacency—as he had tried to do when speaking at Leipzig.

Back again in London he was loud in his complaints of the treatment meted out to him by the Press in England and of the apparent coolness of his reception. During his stay in Berlin at Christmas he had spoken confidently to Hitler and to his friends in his prospect of reaching an understanding. Now his self-assurance was less marked, his confidence leaving him, a little of the gas going out of the balloon of his conceit. He set out to win his way back to favour, which he had so quickly forfeited, by a lavish display of hospitality at the newly-decorated Embassy. Well for him that his wife was a Henkell and that a large share of the champagne millions was at his disposal: for his salary was no more than £1600 a year, with an allowance for maintenance of about another £6000.

He gave a great house-warming party in May in honour of the German delegation to the Coronation, the invitations for which, written in German, intimated that "*der Herzog und die Herzogin von Kent*" had consented to be present. Close upon a thousand guests were there, but so spacious were the reception-rooms that there was no overcrowding. The brilliance of the assemblage, the uniforms, and the display of military and diplomatic orders, made the affair the most picturesque diplomatic function seen in London for over twenty years. The catering was in the hands of a well-known *restaurateur* specially requisitioned from Berlin. A concert was provided by a number of the most talented German artists, and German Museums contributed to the decoration of the Embassy by sending over many famous masterpieces.

But, however lavish his entertainments, however soothing the words of peace which it was his job to utter to counter the Führer's threats of war and Goering's menacing talk about stolen colonies and stolen gold, it needed more than hospitality, more than Ribbentrop's reproofs to Britain for its blindness to specious offers in a Nazi peace, for him to restore the confidence in Hitler's word essential to an understanding with Germany. So much would have to be overlooked or condoned. Nazi violence, the blood-baths and the persecutions must be forgotten. We must not remind ourselves that the Führer had promised that Germany would "tread no other path than that laid down by the Treaties"; that she would "discuss all political and economic questions only within the framework of and through the Treaties"; that "the German Government is ready to accept not only the letter but the spirit of the

Locarno Pact"—and that Hitler had broken all the Treaties by decreeing conscription and fortifying the Rhineland.

Now, German rearmament—for peace—had reached such immense proportions that Britain had been compelled to embark upon a programme of colossal rearmament solely to secure herself from the menace of German aggression. Hitler said: "I want to have a monument in the hearts of my people. A 30-centimetre shell costs 2000 marks. If I have another thousand marks I could build a workman's house." It was not Great Britain that was responsible for the investment of German wealth in guns instead of butter, and Hitler rearmed for war. Goering bellowed about stolen colonies, and Ribbentrop talked of recovering them by "Germany's own strength." Again, the German people, he declared, wished only to be happy in their own way and to be left in peace. "They do not interfere in other people's business and others should not interfere in theirs." Yet Germany had interfered in Austria and caused the Dollfuss murder; she was claiming the Corridor and stirring up trouble in Danzig. She was sending volunteers and war supplies to Spain. Following the *Leipzig* incident, she withdrew her warships from the control scheme. What an atmosphere in which to sue for Britain's friendship!

Hitler longed for peace, but for a German peace: a peace which would find Germany so strong and, withal, so secure in alliances that, because no nation might withstand her, there would be no war. It was for von Ribbentrop to bring England into an appreciation of German aspirations, to make the English realize the greatness of his conception of Nazism and to show them how profoundly Hitler and Germany were misunderstood.

He underestimated the strength of opinion in England over German participation in the war in Spain and the obstacles that were put in the way of genuine non-intervention. He had the truly remarkable capacity of the German to believe only what he wished to believe and consequently he saw the British as mentally perverse in their failure to understand the rightness of Germany's claim to exercise dominion over smaller and weaker nations. His blindness made him perceive blindness in others which often led him to misinform the Führer about the British reaction to the transparent deceit of his own diplomacy and the perjured promises of Hitler.

What value could be attached then to an alliance with Germany, even before the repudiation of the pact with Poland? Since the invasion of Denmark only ten months after the con-

clusion of a non-aggression pact with Germany, German treachery has revealed how limited is the faith that she can keep. But when Ribbentrop pleaded for an alliance, we had only the knowledge of the violation of treaties for the revision of which more or less plausible arguments might be advanced.

Without the Anschluss, without the infamies of Bohemia and Moravia, Poland, Denmark and Norway, Germany's ambassador would never persuade Britain to discard her idealism, ■ forsake her free institutions, to alienate France, and to join in his holy war against Communism. Even forgiving him his errors of tact, serious as they were in sum, by lavish display and soft words, by cultivating friends amongst the aristocracy instead of seeking to know the real convictions of the ordinary democratic Englishman, he could not gain our friendship in exchange for the base coin current in Hitler's Reich.

Nevertheless, many months were to pass before he would realize the completeness of his failure and admit defeat.

## CHAPTER XI

### RIBBENTROP AND THE COLONIES

WHEN von Ribbentrop made his blustering speech at Leipzig he founded the claim for colonies upon an old distortion of the truth which has been made to serve many purposes useful to the Reich. He said that it was only trust in President Wilson's promises which induced the German people to lay down their arms in 1918.

There have been many glaring instances of the falsification of history by Nazi propaganda in order to provide a semblance of justification for invalid titles to redress, and Hitler himself has made the assertion that "Germany laid down her arms and placed herself in the hands of the so-called victors in consequence of" the Fourteen Points. It is, therefore, apt to recall what promises Wilson made and also the two points which Germans claim give colour to their argument.

The Fourteen Points were propounded in a message to Congress on January 8th, 1918, and were intended to form the basis upon which, in Wilson's view, the Allies would be prepared to enter into negotiations for peace with the Central Powers. They were formulated at a time when neither side had vanquished the other, but, if Germany had been willing to subscribe to them, they would no doubt have been loyally implemented by the Allies and even by France. But they were not accepted by the German Government. Germany's strength was yet unimpaired, and with Russia out of the war, the German High Command was confident of victory by the early summer.

They were rejected by the Reichstag, and the German Chancellor, von Hertling, not only refused to consider the surrender of occupied territory, including Flanders, but made new demands and declared, on January 24th, that the military position of Germany had never been so favourable.

In March 1918, Germany forced upon Russia the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, depriving her of nine-tenths of her coal, half of her industries, and a third of her population. In May, a peace as harsh and unconscionable was imposed upon Rumania.

President Wilson, in the light of the German refusal and instructed as to the kind of peace that Germany thought just, began to "revise his programme," as the German Chancellor had advised him to do in January. Long before the Germans commenced overtures for peace, Wilson had made it abundantly clear that the offer of negotiations on the principles formulated in the Fourteen Points must be reconsidered. On September 19th, speaking at a reception of the Diplomatic Corps, he said: "We want absolute victory. No negotiations are admissible. Even if the enemy were to declare to me to-morrow that he was ready to accept the Fourteen Points drawn up by me, the fact ■ that one cannot believe a word our enemies say. We require more than their promise to adhere to the Fourteen Points, namely, their inability to break them."

Early in October, knowing that they had lost the war and that their army was thoroughly beaten, the Germans sued for peace. They may have hoped for negotiations founded on the principles of the Fourteen Points and, no doubt, wished themselves back in the same favourable position to negotiate as in January, but the time for such a peace, or for any negotiations at all, was past. They had uncovered their own barbarous ideas of a triumphant peace when they were still unbeaten and, by their act of rejection, they had caused the intervening slaughter of many hundreds of thousands of Allied and German victims of their great offensives. When the Armistice was signed five weeks later, it was on the basis of unconditional surrender by Germany; and by Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles, the colonies were ceded absolutely.

Nor are the relevant points any more helpful to Germany's case. The first point lays down the principle of open covenants of peace openly arrived at, and precludes "private international understandings of any kind." The fifth point seeks to provide a free and "impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, on the principle that the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable title of the Government whose title is to be determined."

The Germans claimed that their colonies had been portioned out amongst the Allies long before the end of the war by "private international understandings."

What happened was that the Versailles Powers found the Peace Conference too prolix and unwieldy a body to settle the terms which were being drafted for presentation to the Germans for signature. They delegated the task to a Council of Three, consisting of Clemenceau, Wilson, and Lloyd George, and the apportionment ■ the colonies was made by this Council only

after lengthy considerations of the claims of the various victorious Powers. Surely it could not be contended that Wilson, who wanted nothing for the United States, was a party to any prior arrangement.

The only way in which the fifth point could be construed in Germany's favour would be by assuming that the Government whose title was to be determined, *vis-à-vis* the populations concerned, was Germany. There was, however, nothing in the utterances of Wilson or any Allied statesman to indicate such a meaning. The Treaty itself, by providing for absolute cession by Germany, makes her exclusion from the point manifest. Germany, moreover, had already lost her colonies by right of conquest, so that if she were to be considered as having any claim ■ all, the fifth point would have designated her as a third claimant additional to the populations concerned and the Government whose title was to be determined.

But, in any case, reliance on these two points was already ruled out by Wilson's unmistakable withdrawal of the offer of negotiations, both before and at the time of the German appeal for an armistice, and Germany's plea must also fail because the Germans did not, in truth, lay down their arms ■ consequence of the Fourteen Points, but simply because they were not able to carry on the contest. Against the battering the Allied forces gave them in the summer of 1918, they had squandered fully half their effectives, they had lost over six thousand guns and their air supremacy had vanished completely. No amount of special pleading by "the travelling salesman of National-Socialism," Germany's amateur champagne diplomat, can colour her defeat or assign any other reason for her surrender than the true one—as the veterans of the war who cheered Mr. Chamberlain at Godesberg and at Munich could testify, if they were not dumb by compulsion.

Ribbentrop's fable about trust in Wilson is not the only ground upon which it ■ claimed that the colonies were unlawfully confiscated. The legend has been industriously circulated by Schacht, von Epp and Goebbels that in 1914 Great Britain renounced any desire to annex colonies. Certainly Britain did not enter the war to increase her colonial possessions ■ the expense of Germany, but having fought and won, the question inevitably arose as to what was to be done with the colonies after four years' occupation. Germany had enlarged a local conflict in the Balkans into a world war. She had used her colonies so far as she could for belligerent purposes, and was known to harbour ambitions to become a World Power. It was necessary to put it out of her reach ■ repeat the tragedy

of 1914, and to deprive her of territories which she might one day use as strategic points in another war.

Naturally, the Germans would have been very glad to keep the war out of the colonies, for they had not the means to protect them. What they wanted, of course, was to confine hostilities to areas in which they were strong and keep ■ out of those which they were unable to defend, so they made a suggestion to that effect to the Allies during the first few weeks of war. This, however, was not accepted.

Hitler has stated that "the demand for colonies will ever and again be raised for our so densely populated country," but until the beginning of the century, when the ex-Kaiser conceived his plan for *Mittelafrika*, Germany regarded the possession of colonies as an encumbrance involving irksome responsibilities and unprofitable expense. In fact, her colonial empire absorbed an amount of capital wholly disproportionate to any benefits she might obtain. It was run at a loss up to the outbreak of the war, when it was promptly seized by the forces of the Allies. The empire had only come into being under Bismarck in the latter part of the nineteenth century, for the reason that, being a nation in the centre of Europe, Germany's natural trend for expansion was eastwards, on the Continent rather than overseas. The great colonial empires of the world were all acquired by nations possessing extensive seabords—Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, and Holland—more often than not through the establishment of trading posts by adventurous voyagers in various parts of the world, and the natural development of their sea-borne commerce.

In 1914 Germany was the third largest Colonial Power, ranking next after Great Britain and France. But, vast as the territories under her control were, extending to upwards of a million square miles, they were of little value to her for the purposes for which the exponents of colonial retrocession now require them. Apart from moral grounds—that they were "stolen" from her; that an impartial adjustment of claims was promised; that Germany neither suffered military defeat nor was rightly designated as being mainly responsible for the war—the demand for their return is made, first, for economic reasons, secondly, in order to provide areas for settlement of Germans, and lastly, on the score ■ prestige. "We are neither willing nor able to accept a position of inferiority compared to other countries," declared General von Epp.

On the question of the morality of the seizure of Germany's colonies, mention must be made of the allegation, frequently expressed, that Britain brought the war into the colonies and

thereby was guilty ■ an infraction of the Congo Act of 1885. By that Act, Britain, France, Belgium and Germany renounced the use in war of the Congo Basin, which included the Cameroons, Togoland and German South-West Africa.

Great Britain and her Dominions certainly did proceed to occupy by force of arms the German colonies in the Basin and elsewhere. But the occupation was necessary for strategic reasons, to counter German warlike activities in them. Although unable to command the employment of colonial troops in any number, Germany was able to establish submarine bases in her colonies from which to prey upon Allied shipping; she made instant warlike use of her powerful wireless station in Togoland and, from the neighbouring territory of German South-West, incited rebellion within the Union of South Africa. In pursuance of her *Mittelafrika* plan, too, there existed ample proof in the form of German-made maps showing a Germanized Central and South Africa, and in the writings of her publicists, that she had designs on the Belgian Congo and on Portuguese possessions in Africa. Even South Africa was not exempt from her envy, so as to put it in the power of Germany to threaten Australia and British India. Germany, therefore, claimed immunity for her own possessions, although she was herself guilty of violation and clearly intended to despoil the empires of the Allies.

To establish the wickedness of the Allies, Germans not only pointed to the unwarlike use which they had made of their colonies. They invented the lie that their colonies were taken from them because the Treaty of Versailles declared Germany's unfitness to be a Colonial Power. That there is not a word in the Treaty supporting that lie needs only a reference to its text and may therefore be summarily dismissed. But there does exist in the minds of many people a grave doubt whether, if a conclusive case for the return of the colonies were made out, it would be wise or equitable to give unfettered control of native populations to a nation whose racial theory has caused ■ to persecute without mercy Jews, Catholics and so-called sub-races. Nor does Germany's record of colonial administration create a feeling of confidence. Admittedly the records ■ other nations in this respect, Britain included, are not without blemishes. But instances of diabolical cruelty such as were exposed in German treatment of the Herero natives are, fortunately, without parallel in any other empire than Germany's.

For many years before the present war, while Anglo-German friendship remained a possibility, there was a disposition to

try to forget, or to pass lightly over the atrocities inflicted by Germany upon natives in her possessions. It is as well to remind ourselves of what is surely one of the blackest chapters in the history of all colonial administration—the “pacification” of the Hereros by Germany.

The Hereros were one of the principal races inhabiting German South-West Africa, now joined to the Union. They rebelled against their German masters, whose commander, Trotha, issued orders for their utter extermination ; orders which were intensively carried out with the utmost ferocity and thoroughness. The orders specifically included men, women and children, all of whom were to be shot on sight, so that this tribe, which had dared to rebel against the conditions imposed upon them, should literally and in actual fact cease altogether to exist. This was no punitive expedition to teach a lesson, but a prolonged and defined effort which extended over a period of no less than five years.

There were a hundred thousand Hereros when the campaign of extermination commenced. When it was brought to a close there were less than fifteen thousand. The pitiful remnant was deprived of its lands and robbed of its cattle ; and thus, in an arid and infertile country, virtually left to starve. The other native races, the Hottentots, the Ovambo, the Bastards and the Bantu, were graciously allowed to exist, but were confined to a small area of their country which was set aside as a reservation for them. They were debarred from raising or keeping stock ; which, in a country unfit for agriculture, means practical destitution. They were not, however, deprived of the right to work, for a system of forced labour was introduced by the Germans, not entirely for the benefit of the natives. What were left of the Hereros were, of course, outside this benignant scheme and they were even excluded from the reservations.

By contrast, under South African rule, there is no forced labour ; every native, Herero or Hottentot, possesses land ; the reservations have been quadrupled and there is no ban on the native ownership of sheep or cattle. The Herero population has more than doubled since Germany was compelled to relinquish possession.

In the light of consideration of “the interests of the populations concerned” enjoined by the fifth ■ the Fourteen Points invoked by Ribbentrop, the return of German South-West to Germany must surely be forever prohibited ; and ■ the native races, Herero or any other, were given the option ■ German or British rule, the colony would remain in the Union,

as their chiefs have categorically affirmed. On moral grounds alone, therefore, the conclusion seems inevitable that it would be highly immoral to make restitution. Yet, to a German, it must seem ironical that Ruanda-Urundi should have been handed to Belgium, whose cruelties in the Congo at one time caused a scandal of world-wide dimensions.

As an argument, prestige has a wider scope, for, apart from the stigma of the conquest of the German colonies, it propounds a basis for possessions which is as insidious as it is untenable. It presupposes the right of every nation to possess an empire commensurate with her size and power. Conversely, the implication cannot be logically resisted that large empires belonging to small nations must be proportionately reduced. Germany, with a population of eighty millions, is *ipso facto* entitled as of right to claim a due proportion of the world's surface. It follows that Britain, with a population of only forty-odd millions; France, with a like number, and other colonial powers such as Belgium, Holland, and Portugal, should, according to the theorists of the Reich, hand over a due share of overseas territory for division amongst the "have-not" nations. The rights conferred by settlement, by the hardihood of early adventurers and emigrants from the mother countries, equally with the right of conquest, are all to be ignored. The expenditure on development, the years of patient administration, the sacrifices and labours of the colonizers and explorers are not to weigh in the scale against the prestige of Hitler's Greater Germany. Even the wishes and interests of the populations concerned cannot be considered, and China, *ad absurdum*, would gain an empire eight or nine times the size of the British Empire!

It is regarded as inconceivable in Germany that Belgium and Portugal, each with a population of six or seven millions, should both possess a million square miles of colonial empire, and that forty million French should rule over five million square miles, while Germany should have no colonies at all.

Jealousy and envy represent the real attitude in Germany to the colonial question. It is not that Germany only wants her former colonies restored to her—colonies of which she made so little use when she had them. She wants much more than that: no less than the redistribution of the whole world which Dr. Goebbels has claimed. Goebbels considers that the "rare moment" in history has arrived when Germany will seize her appropriate share.

She has no more right to that share than has any "have-not" in the goods at which he peers through the plate-glass of a

jeweller's window. Only when "smash and grab" becomes legalized in international relations and sheer Might triumphs over unquestioned Right, can the claim of prestige, and Goebbels' extension of it, secure for Germany the envied prizes for which the manhood of other nations has bled and endured.

The scope of Germany's colonial demands is, however, rarely made to appear so extravagant as Goebbels' idea of a redistribution of the world, and the spearhead of the attack is usually Britain. When Ribbentrop was in Rome arranging for Italy's adhesion to the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1937, he voiced it more modestly, but still made a declaration of ambitions which would, if realized, strike a fatal blow at the security of our Empire.

He then told Signor Mussolini that Germany's minimum programme of colonial demands includes the return to Germany of Togoland, the Cameroons and Ruanda-Urundi, and the creation of a vast, internationalized territory in Africa to be exploited in common by Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

That, no doubt, represents more nearly than either Goebbels' inflated view of German rights, or the official pleas for mere restitution, what Hitler and Ribbentrop would like to bring about. Naturally, the actual extent of the claim is suited to the occasion on which it is advanced, or the audience to whom it is advertised. In this, as in other matters, what is taught to the German at home is not always fit for a foreigner to hear; and what may be confided to an ally who is also without large possessions must be scaled down so as not to scare the intended victims of the full programme.

It follows that if a vast territory in Africa were to be internationalized, France, Belgium and Portugal would also be expected to bring their colonies into hotchpotch, and therefore any weakening of resistance by Great Britain must undermine the safety of those other colonial empires as well as her own. But if Africa, why not India and all the colonies of any Power throughout the world?

The importance of the whole question, whether it relates to the return of the former possessions only, or the creation of an internationalized area in Africa for exploitation, ■ that if any of Germany's demands were acceded to, the concession would only be a stage in Germany's imperial progress. Hitler proceeds by stages, as Bismarck did before him.

He secured equality for Germany, rearmed and wriggled out ■ the Versailles Treaty by stages, each one accompanied by expressions of assuagement that proved to be temporary. Like

a boa-constrictor, replete with its latest meal, before lying down to digest each victim of his bloodless victories in Europe—from the Saar ■ the Czechs—he announced his final satisfaction, while the Democracies and the little states vainly hoped his primitive hunger would not return.

So would it be if he were to gain for Germany a foothold in Africa—Bismarck's policy of the limited objective over again, but pursued to a limitless end. With one square mile of Africa, Germany would break bounds as surely as a wild animal uncaged will find its forage.

In London, Ribbentrop made it his business to press the question of colonies on every possible occasion, acting his part of the wolf before the British Red Riding Hood with plaintive skill and tearful aplomb. But the eyes of British Ministers were surely if slowly opening, and they were becoming increasingly aware that any concession would only lead to greater demands. They did more than proffer the artless comment of the fable—What big eyes you've got, Granny! In 1937, Great Britain adopted a programme of rearmament with which Germany, it was thought, for all her start would find difficulty in coping. The Government declared that the question of the return of colonies had not even been considered. Later, in France, M. Daladier published a statement affirming explicitly the intention to maintain intact the post-war distribution of Germany's former possessions, expressly including the mandated territories.

More plausible, and therefore more dangerous, are the economic arguments advanced by Ribbentrop at Leipzig, reinforced as they have been by the ingenuity of Dr. Schacht. Under this heading he claimed three vital reasons for Germany's demand, namely, the colonies were needed for the supply of raw materials; for the provision of markets for Germany's products, and for German colonial settlement.

In 1914, her possessions in Africa comprised Togoland, the Cameroons, German South-West, and German East Africa. There were also New Guinea, certain islands in the Pacific, and Kiaochow in Asia. Altogether her empire embraced more than a million square miles and a population ■ fourteen millions, of whom only about twenty-six thousand were whites.

Early in the war, the Cameroons, Togoland and the Pacific possessions were seized by the Allies; in 1915 South-West Africa surrendered, and eventually German East Africa succumbed to military operations.

In the share-out after the war, Great Britain obtained the Mandates for Tanganyika and small parts ■ Togoland and the

Cameroons. The Union of South Africa took over the whole of German South-West, France received the major parts of the Cameroons and Togoland, and Ruanda-Urundi was assigned to Belgium. The possessions in the Pacific were divided between Japan, Australia and New Zealand, while those in Asia went to Japan, reverting later to China. In effect, distribution followed conquest.

It was a great empire for Germany to lose, but it was lost by right of conquest after a war for which Germany bears a heavy responsibility, if not the whole of it. Under the Treaty she ceded her colonies to the Powers absolutely, without conditions. From the first, there was a group in Germany which refused to acknowledge the loss as irrevocable, but it was not until the Nazi Party became supreme that the agitation for restoration became vociferous. Under the influence of his lieutenants, Hitler adopted the demand and, as we have seen, a whole volume of spurious data and specious arguments was compiled in support.

The invidious aspect of the agitation is seen in the constant parade by von Epp, Ribbentrop, Schacht and Hitler, of Britain luxuriating in possessions extending over a quarter of the globe while Germany starves for raw materials, markets and areas for the settlement of a surplus population which, on their own showing, does not exist.

Great Britain, they say, through her Empire, can draw upon half the world's supplies of wool and rubber, a third of its copper and a quarter of its wheat. By contrast, Germany, cut off from all sources of colonial supply, is dependent upon purchases abroad for almost the whole of her foodstuffs and raw materials which, with semi-manufactured goods, account for three-fourths of her total imports. They declare that if the "colonial injustice" were righted, Germany could in time absorb the rest of her unemployed, that Germany ■ essentially in need of her colonies which would produce raw materials and in which German money would circulate and be accepted as legal tender. "We must be able to make the necessary purchases ■ raw materials with our own money."

Some of these arguments of Germany's spokesmen have, undoubtedly, a foundation in fact, and there is a hardship which, to them, is the same as an injustice. It is true that Germany is essentially a highly industrialized country incapable of producing either the foodstuffs or the raw materials which she requires; that she would gain in purchasing power by buying in colonies in which German paper marks would be current, and that with the enormous developments in modern

intensive methods, countries which were unproductive twenty years ago might be rendered, to some extent, productive.

But it is not true that Germany wants her former colonies for the purpose of colonial settlement by her surplus population ; nor is there foundation for the claim that from those colonies Germany could obtain any substantial relief in respect of the supply of raw material and food. It is equally fallacious to maintain, as von Epp has tried to do, that the deterioration in the standard of living in Germany, compared with pre-war years, is a tragic result of the loss of her colonies.

On the authority of Mr. I. S. Amery, in 1913 Germany drew one two-hundredth part—0·5 per cent—of her imports from her colonial empire, and exported to it only 0·6 per cent of her total exports. In the prosperous year of 1929 the total imports of the German colonies amounted to 2 per cent of Germany's export trade.

Moreover, Germany is not prevented from importing, and has continued to import from them such raw materials as they are capable of producing. "The greater part of them—viz. Tanganyika, Cameroons and Togoland—are, in virtue of the mandatory undertakings of their present possessors, precluded from pursuing any policy of trade discrimination, at any rate as regards members of the League of Nations. Germany has continued to benefit by this provision. She is not only as free to buy, but as free to sell, in these territories, and the adjoining territories, as those who directly administer them."<sup>1</sup>

On the subject of the colonies as fields for German settlement, Mr. Amery states that "in the last ten years before the war, the average German migration to German colonies was between thirty and forty, out of a total German emigration of 25,000 a year. By 1914 the total German population of these colonies was under 20,000, inclusive of some 3000 soldiers and police."<sup>1</sup>

It would therefore seem to require more than the wizardry of Dr. Schacht, the persuasions of Dr. Clodius, or the salesmanship of von Ribbentrop to conjure a sufficient increase in both import and export trade over pre-war figures to establish the validity of either the tragic deprivation suffered by Germany or the importance of her colonies on economic grounds. If she had not preferred guns to butter, ■ she had not pursued a policy of trade restrictions and ■ she had not diverted from trade the thousands of millions spent on colossal armaments and the raw material needed for their manufacture,

<sup>1</sup> *East Africa and Rhodesia and Germany's Colonial Demands*, both by L. S. Amery, M.P.

the standard of living in Germany would have entailed no sacrifice, and those millions would have been available for trading on an equality with every other nation ■ any market throughout the world. To take one example only : Switzerland ■ a country which depends for all her raw materials on purchases abroad ; yet, by a policy of free trade and a saner expenditure, she does not need to squeal for sympathy. Germany, in truth, often makes her own difficulties and invariably translates them into grievances.

Moreover, the fact cannot be overlooked that the German demand is not for the transfer of mandates, but for a resumption of the absolute sovereignty of the territories which Germany exercised in 1914. The mandates carry an obligation to administer those territories in the interests of their populations, rather than to use them as fields for exploitation of the natives. They require an annual account of the Mandatory Power's administration to be rendered to the League and, in the case of Germany's former possessions, they are in the hands of nations whose democratic institutions provide a check in the form of freedom to criticize in an elected Parliament the trusteeship of the Mandatory Power. As much by reason of her past colonial record as by reference to Germany's mishandling of her own nationals, Jewish, Catholic and Protestant, it would be an outrage against civilization to allow Germany to control and enslave again the peoples to whom the Great War gave a measure of freedom. Now, with the examples of the atrocities in Poland and the subjection of the Czechs before us, the lesson has been hammered further home, and Germany must truly be born again before she can ever be entrusted with the destinies of any people who are not Germans.

There is, however, room for satisfaction in that determination on the question of colonies has kept ■ out of the power of Hitler to use possessions in Africa and in the Pacific to stir up trouble in the Allied Empires, or to establish bases therein for the furtherance of his aims in the present war. "Germany demands the fundamental right to colonial possessions," Ribbentrop said at Leipzig. But neither the thunderous menaces of Goering nor the perjuries of Goebbels, neither the fallacies of Schacht nor the ravings of Hitler, any more than the insolent challenge of Ribbentrop, have advanced the German case one iota. But however the war results, the claim will some day be renewed, even should Germany again suffer defeat. The danger lies in a result which might win for Germany a negotiated peace wherein a pliant idealism might allow natural sympathy for insufficiency, which is mainly the cause of war,

to override reason and persuade us that a lasting peace and German friendship may be purchased by concessions.

Mr. Churchill, while Ribbentrop was still campaigning for the return of the colonies and against Bolshevism, wrote characteristically as follows :

" We are willing to be friendly. We do not like your new institutions, your racial and religious intolerance, your treatment of Jews, Catholics and Protestants. We even think our method of dealing with Communism is better than yours. But, so long as they are confined to Germany, it is not our business.

" Are we expected to do anything special to prove our friendship ; if so, what ? We cannot help Germany financially while she spends nearly a thousand millions on rearming. We cannot hand over colonies irrespective of the wishes of the inhabitants. We would be very wrong — we guaranteed that so long as she left us alone she could do what she liked — the peoples of the Centre and South-East of Europe. To hold these opinions is not hostile to the German Government or to the German nation."

Those words, directly aimed at Hitler's self-satisfied apostle, ambassador and friend, are the antithesis of everything for which von Ribbentrop stood. They expose his arguments and condemn his mission ; but impervious to reason, blind to his blunders and sublimely unconscious of his own inadequacy, the Ambassador and Plenipotentiary of the Reich continued to demand the colonies, persisted in the vision of Hitler as our saviour from Bolshevism and still sought the friendship of Britain on the basis of an unworthy realism.

Mr. Eden commented drily on another aspect of Ribbentrop's Leipzig speech : " I do not believe in diplomacy by long-range speaking," he declared. In the House of Commons he gave Britain's answer to the Leipzig outburst with a bluntness which could leave no room for misunderstanding anywhere. " A few days ago the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs stated that the Government had not considered and were not considering the transfer of any territory under British political control. That statement remains the policy of His Majesty's Government and I have nothing whatever to add to that reply."

Sir Robert Horne, a former Chancellor — the Exchequer, also delivered a scathing rebuke of Ribbentrop's impertinence.

" That an ambassador should leave his office and return — his native country for the purpose — making that claim is quite unexampled in the history of our country. . . . If it were intended to persuade us to be acquiescent in the demand,

then all I can say is that it is the last way in which the British people are likely to be persuaded."

What, then, were the words that called for such severe strictures from Sir Robert? They could only be regarded as a threat.

*The colonies will either be returned by agreement or they will come back with the help of the German people's own strength.*

For less provocation than that, foreign Governments have been requested to recall their ambassadors.

## CHAPTER XII

### MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

**M**ORE than once the Führer has declared that Germany would not go to war merely to obtain satisfaction of her colonial demands, but of so transient a nature is any assurance given by him that it would be folly to imagine that he would ever forgo them entirely. In *Mein Kampf* he deprecated the pursuit of a colonial policy, subordinating ■ to the greater advantage of having England as an ally covering Germany's rear while he imposed his will on France and the other nations of Europe.

In November 1937, he told Lord Halifax that he was prepared to wait a few more years. Later, he said much the same thing to Sir Nevile Henderson. His notorious patience, so often strained by "intolerable" situations, was to be extended, not out of consideration for the British Empire, but as a matter of expediency and hard calculation. It was to be exercised just for so long as would see Germany powerful enough, by increasing her grip on the States of Central Europe, to get all she wanted from Great Britain merely by asking for it.

Germany was not ready at the close of 1937 to risk a trial of strength with Great Britain. The Four Years Plan had not then been given enough time to fulfil the expectations of its promoters. Naval strength, limited by the Naval Agreement as well as by the pressure of economics, was disproportionate. Neither the army nor the air force, great as they were, could be regarded as fully equipped and officered for ■ major war. Retracting nothing, Hitler knew that he must wait awhile, expand eastwards by easy stages and, avoiding war, grow in strength with each advance. But he was strong enough to threaten and blackmail the little States of Europe one at a time. He gave it as his opinion, ■ a speech at Augsburg in the autumn of 1937, that ■ would need six years to complete the first part of his programme of expansion, namely, the incorporation within the Reich of all people of German blood in Europe.

In itself the claim to the "oppressed" minorities has been

all along but a plausible excuse for aggression, as is proved by the glaring instance of the germanic minority in South Tyrol, who have been forcibly italianized in true Fascist style before Hitler's very eyes. Yet, because of the need for the Italian alliance, the Führer regards the Italo-German frontier as "forever unchangeable." In the same way the politicians of the Reich were prepared to barter their colonial aspirations for British benevolence, as their salesman Ribbentrop has since sold half of Poland and supremacy of the Baltic to the Soviets in return for Russian neutrality.

Ribbentrop, serenely unconscious of the calamitous effects of his blunders in London and of the resentment which his Nazi arrogance aroused, still thought there was a fair chance of driving a bargain with England in 1937. Contrary to Hitler's precept that "flaming protests" are ■ no avail without the sword, he hoped that fear for the Empire's safety would induce in Britain a wish to placate Germany by making concessions. Influenced by the pro-German leanings of a small but unrepresentative circle of friends in London, he believed that his crusade against Bolshevism would yet bear fruit and that he might drive a wedge between France and Britain by holding up ■ execration the Franco-Soviet Pact.

There was an evident disposition on the part of Ministers to go a long way towards meeting the German colonial claims, but not at the price of giving Germany freedom for aggression. Moreover, at the root of every problem affecting Anglo-German relations lay a warranted distrust of the permanence of Hitler's pledges and a realization of the evasions and devious methods ■ Ribbentrop's diplomacy. There was, too, such obvious falsity and so much special pleading in the grounds of the objections raised against the Pact that it was impossible to believe in their sincerity.

The Franco-Soviet Pact only came into being because Germany refused to join in an Eastern Security Pact which was intended to embrace all the nations, including Germany, whose interests were concerned in the maintenance of a general peace. At the time, Germany had been offered an opportunity to co-operate on the basis of "full equality of rights in a system of security." She was then subject to the military restrictions imposed upon her by Part V of the Versailles Treaty. She complained then that she was encircled. As Sir Austen Chamberlain said, she was invited to "sit inside the circle" and to share the benefits of all the guarantees for security which the projected agreements would afford. The military restrictions of the Treaty would be lifted and she was

invited to make her contribution to "the restoration of confidence and the prospects of peace among nations by means of a general settlement freely negotiated."

There were good reasons for requiring an earnest ~~■~~ German intentions to restore lost confidence. Europe was recoiling in horror at the disclosures of the cruelties of the concentration camps, the brutality of the great purge of June 30th, and the murder of Dollfuss. Particularly in Moscow, there was the fear that internal violence in Germany might soon be translated into acts of external aggression. The Russians made an approach to France for a defensive alliance. Italy and France, reacting to the threat to Austria partially revealed by the Nazi murder plot in Vienna, reached an understanding for safeguarding her independence, the maintenance of which presented the main obstacle to aggressive action by Germany. They agreed that Germany must formally recognize the independence of Austria and sought the participation of the neighbouring States in a comprehensive pact to ensure it.

The Locarno Treaties, not yet denounced by Hitler, provided for security in the West. It was intended by means of the Eastern Security Pact to make similar provision in the East of Europe. Neither Germany nor Russia was a member of the League of Nations and therefore neither was bound by the Covenant against aggressive action. Germany was asked to join in organizing security by the conclusion of a series of pacts between all the interested parties to ensure mutual assistance in Eastern Europe. She was asked to participate in the Rome plan for safeguarding peace in Central Europe by guaranteeing the integrity of Austria. Moreover, the conclusion of a Western Air Pact was urged in order to bring the Locarno Treaties up to date with the development of the destructive power of the modern aeroplane. The hope was expressed, but it was not made a condition, that Germany would resume her place in the League of Nations as part of the general settlement. In fine, Germany was offered inducements, equality, armaments, security and peace, without being asked to give up anything but aggressive intentions.

This was a great opportunity for Hitler to demonstrate the peaceful nature of the new régime. If he were afraid of Russia or Poland, or of any other neighbour, he had only to enter into the pacts to be safe from all aggression and all encirclement. ~~■~~ If he agreed, France and Russia would have no need to enter into a bilateral agreement whose only object would be to make provision against German expansion in the East. But if he refused, the countries whose overtures were repulsed

would make an obvious deduction from the fact ■ refusal and provide accordingly for their own defence against Germany.

The French, in their dealings with Russia, were unwilling to depart from the principle of collective security embodied ■ the Covenant and Locarno. They did not want a bilateral alliance with Russia if a wider scheme in which Germany collaborated for peace could come into force. The parleys with the Soviets were, therefore, set aside until Hitler gave his answer.

In Rome the proposals were warmly welcomed. Even ■ Germany there was a grudging admission that they might form a basis for negotiation—but that was as far as Berlin ever got. Herr Hitler, so ardent in protestations, so fearful of his Lilliputian neighbours, would not join in an agreement to preserve peace and punish aggression, because that would prevent him later from interfering with Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Ukraine.

He paid lip service to the high motives underlying the scheme. He even promised to examine the proposals with care, welcomed the idea of the Air Pact, and made suggestions which went even further than the original proposals. But almost immediately, on March 16th, he issued a proclamation introducing conscription into the Reich. That was his answer. On March 25th, he refused to join in an Eastern Pact and told Sir John Simon that he could not enter into any pact of mutual assistance with the Soviets. How falsely that refusal reads in the light of the German-Soviet Pact of 1939 !

The overtures having been repulsed, the nations drew their proper conclusions and proceeded to provide without Germany for their defence. In May, France and Russia reached an understanding to afford each other aid in the event of unprovoked aggression independently of whether the League took action in accordance with the Covenant or not. Nevertheless, so reluctant had the French been to take a step which, although purely a defensive arrangement, appeared to aim at preventing German aggression only, that the Franco-Soviet Pact was not ratified by the French Chamber until February ■ the following year. Ten days later the pact which France had not wished to make, the pact which was made solely because Hitler refused to co-operate in the general scheme of peace, was used by him as the pretext for violating the Treaty of Locarno by re-occupying the Rhineland.

That was the manner of Hitler's reply, and this was the pact against which Ribbentrop fulminated and fumed in London. Germany condemned it, yet gave her case away by rejecting the proposal ■ submit it to the Hague Court. She condemned

it ostensibly on the ground that it contemplated action outside the radius of the Covenant, but in reality because she saw in ■ a fatal obstacle ■ her progress towards the domination ■ Europe. The Rome Agreement insured Austria's independence, and when the Franco-Soviet Pact was extended to embrace Czechoslovakia, Germany succumbed to a feigned claustrophobia and felt more than ever encircled by a ring of hostile nations. Because her neighbours took precautions to ensure their own safety which she rejected, she considered herself threatened and insecure. No nation had any intention of attacking her nor any reason to do so. There was nothing they wanted from Germany and they only required her to keep the peace.

If she were to expand, Germany had to find a means to break the ring of peaceful encirclement. She chose the Franco-Soviet Pact as the medium, and Bolshevism as the hobgoblin, wherewith to frighten England into an understanding which, incidentally, must alienate France from her ally. The object of an Anglo-German Alliance, according to the author of *Mein Kampf*, was to "allow Germany the possibility of making those preparations in all tranquillity which, within the framework of such a coalition, might in one way or another be requisite in view of a regulation of accounts with France. . . . Thus France, the mortal enemy of Germany, would be isolated."<sup>1</sup>

By the same reasoning, and in order to make doubly sure of France's isolation, Italian complaisance was also necessary. Eventually this became possible owing to the hazard of Italy's campaign in Ethiopia, which caused sanctions to be imposed but brought no censure from Germany. The Axis was formed, and the common adventure of the dictators in Spain served to bring Germany and Italy still closer together, completing the work which Hitler's encouragement ■ the conquest of Abyssinia had so happily begun. Mussolini, who really hated Communism with all his heart, had earned for his country almost universal condemnation by his savage display of Fascist aggression. So welcome did the friendship ■ Germany now seem ■ an unfriendly world, that the frontiers of Austria, which he had stoutly maintained were "for ever unchangeable," lost for him their inviolability. More desirable now for Italy, exhausted by two expensive wars, was an accommodation between the Fascist and the Nazi regimes, whose realist ideologies presented many features of resemblance. Mussolini might carve an empire out of the desert wastes of Northern

<sup>1</sup> Unexpurgated English translation, p. 540.

Africa, wrest control of the Mediterranean from the dying empires of France and England, and keep the oppressed Germans of South Tyrol—if he would withdraw his protection from the Central European States.

It was to be an association of brigands, a partnership of self-interest conceived in anti-Bolshevism, fostered by the spirit of vengeance for injustices and brought to maturity by envy of the rich possessions of others.

In England, Ribbentrop flogged the dead horse of anti-Bolshevism with less and less success, and his hectoring attitude over colonies brought only reproof. As 1937 drew towards its close, rumours of his forthcoming resignation from the Embassy revived and gained wider currency. He had spent more than a third of his time since his appointment outside England, and he was reputed to be so downcast at the utter failure of his mission that he was understood to have asked for his release. Of course, the blindness of the English natives, to whom he had brought the gospel of Nazism, was responsible for his obvious lack of success. They had neglected to grasp the friendly hand of Hitler, proffered in all sincerity with so much persistent disinterestedness. Wilfully, they would not see the terror spreading from Moscow, although "the great man South of the Alps" who had gassed the Ethiopians, perceived it; and even "the yellow branch of the Aryan tree" quivered with horror of it, whilst inoculating the Chinese with culture Japonica by invading their country. And how had these purblind English treated the accredited envoy of Hitler, the potential saviour of Europe from the hordes of the Kremlin?

Their Press had ventured to criticize him, their Government had declined to change its ambassador in Berlin, or its Foreign Secretary, at his whim. Their Ministers had bluntly refused even to consider the return of any of the colonies which were, after all, inhabited only by black people—"half-monkeys," as Hitler described them, who were not fit to receive education. Even when Ribbentrop had threatened that the lost lands would be recovered "by Germany's own strength," Sir John Simon had told Hitler that the question was "undiscussable."

In everything he undertook to do in England he came to grief, from the day of his arrival. The primary object, an Anglo-German understanding which Britain had been willing, nay, eager to promote, was further removed than ever when he left London. Bolshevism, for which Britain could feel no sympathy whatever, was less likely at the beginning of 1938 to keep her at arm's length from the Soviets than on the day when he preached its danger at Victoria Station in 1936.

Colonies? There had long been a spirit of accommodation in many quarters in England, and the question was "discussable" at some period, without any doubt. But, by the time he bade farewell to the Embassy in Carlton House Terrace, opinion had hardened so much that he might also say good-bye for ever to the chance of any part — Germany's former possessions being willingly restored to her.

As for the wedge which he sought with much ingenuity and misplaced industry to drive between the French and the British, one has only to look at the gaping chasms which divided the policies of the two nations in 1936, and then consider the improvement in their relations eighteen months later, to see how the rifts had healed and the rough edges of disagreement drawn together, despite the "perjured diplomacy" of von Ribbentrop.

It would be incorrect, however, to regard the tactlessness of Ribbentrop and his unpopularity as the sole causes of his failure. The roots of incompatibility were too deeply embedded in the policy and aims of Germany and Hitler. If he had behaved more seemingly in England, no doubt there would have been less resentment at his conceit, less irritation and friction. But underground, the roots, spreading outwards towards Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig, would still have needed drastic pruning to take a shape agreeable to British eyes. The gulf between the ideals of Germany and Great Britain was too wide to be bridged even if, instead of a blunderer, a perfect paragon of diplomatic tact had been sent to reconcile their fundamental differences.

It cannot be forgotten that Ribbentrop, as much as Goering, Goebbels and Hitler, even though he genuinely desired an understanding, pursued it with sinister purposes. Whatever guise he assumed, the design was to secure immunity for Germany from interference during the development of her expansion into the Greater Germany of Hitler's cherished dreams.

Back in 1933, his first appointment as Commissioner for Disarmament Questions was given him because of his insistence on the need for rearmament—the prime essential to external acts of violence. Each move to become free from the restrictions of Versailles and Locarno was taken after his advice had been accepted in preference to the more sober counsels of the Führer's other advisers: the introduction of conscription, the Rhineland, the "withdrawal" of Germany's signature from solemn treaties.

Moreover, — was the inventor and architect of the anti-

Comintern Pact with Japan, designed with the twofold object involving Russia and endangering British interests in the Far East. He helped in the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis and, later, to bring Italy into the triangle against Communism, which was but another attempt to create a totalitarian bloc for aggression and the discomfiture of the democracies under the cloak of a doctrine. To these must be added a large share in fomenting the civil war in Spain and the elevation of the colonial question to the height of an issue to be settled by an appeal to force.

At every stage in the growth of Germany into a vast military machine for disturbing the peace of the world, the finger of von Ribbentrop plainly discernible pointing towards violence. Without rearmament, Germany would not have been so soon in a favourable position to levy blackmail. Only by arming and fortifying the Rhineland could Germany become fit partner of the Axis ; and without the Axis the outrages of 1938 and 1939, involving Austria, the Sudetenland, Prague and Poland, could never have been perpetrated.

Failure in England, however, could not dim the lustre of his achievements in other fields in the eyes of the Führer. He was still Hitler's personal friend : the one whose advice had many times proved correct—given invariably to coincide with the Führer's own inclinations and intuitions. He it was who could always precisely say just how much France and Britain would stand without calling a halt.

Hitler felt in 1938 that the time had come to commence making an end of those iniquitous "oppressions" of Germans in Europe which caused him such acute distress. He knew that no one could be found in all Germany better suited for his purpose than the sycophant, von Ribbentrop. The ambassador carried imitation of his master's passionate antics to such depths of devotion that he could simulate at will the most profound emotions, induce auto-hysteria and shed impromptu tears. Hitler's Nazi salute was copied by him minutely, his mannerisms and even his weaknesses : a subtle form of flattery against which dictators are unarmed. Ribbentrop could be relied upon to give his ambitious master exactly the advice he wanted.

At last some realization came to him of his unpopularity in London and of the hostility his actions and utterances had aroused. Bitterness over his personal failure as ambassador caused him no introspection, but turned instead to hatred of Britain and the British. He became a man with a grievance against the people of the country whose friendship he had once

ardently desired. His pride was hurt ; ~~he~~ was vindictive and implacable, but his conceit remained and his self-esteem was undiminished. In no more dangerous frame of mind could a man be who was shortly to assume the responsibility of the office of Foreign Minister of Germany.

Nevertheless, the opportunity for his promotion did not come as a result ~~of~~ his own request, although his mind had been long set upon ousting von Neurath. On January 12th, 1938, the Minister of War, Field-Marshal von Blomberg, married a lady of dubious reputation. He was a close friend of Hitler, who attended the wedding as a witness, knowing nothing of the bride's record in the dossiers of Himmler, the Chief of the Secret Police. On disciplinary grounds, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army, General von Fritsch, protested to Hitler and demanded the dismissal of Blomberg, accompanying his protest with some outspoken criticism of the Führer's policy towards Austria.

Hitler was equally incensed at Blomberg's deception in keeping secret the antecedents of his bride and at Fritsch's criticism, supported as the latter was by members of the General Staff. Moreover, he was determined that there should be no opposition from the army or the diplomats now that the time was ripe to put into operation his plans for the subjection of Austria. As he had to get rid of von Blomberg, he decided to make the occasion one for a clean sweep of all the moderate elements, military, naval, administrative and diplomatic, which might hamper him in his design.

On February 4th, 1938, he announced the changes which subsequently became known as the Palace Revolution. Fritsch and Blomberg were both relieved of their posts, together with a number of officers and high officials of the army and the services. Hitler assumed supreme command of all the armed forces, appointed General von Brauchitsch Commander-in-Chief and General Keitel War Minister. He dismissed the moderate von Neurath, and Joachim von Ribbentrop was nominated to the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The changes were indicative of a new and more violent policy on the part of Hitler. He had been opposed in other daring schemes by his generals and warned against them by Neurath. Supreme over army, navy and air force, and with a Foreign Minister who, instead of trying to restrain him, would more likely urge him onwards, Hitler made a "revolution" which was full of evil omens for the future ~~of~~ Europe and the security of Germany's neighbours.

The most portentous of these was the dropping of Blomberg

and the appointment of the hot-head Ribbentrop, who returned at once to Berlin. Here, he found that his predecessor had been consoled with an ornamental position at the head of a consultative committee which numbered the new Foreign Minister amongst its members. But he found also that the Führer was in the throes of a violent reaction resulting from the crisis which followed Blomberg's marriage, and further embittered by the recent failure of Dr. Taxis' plot for stirring up a Nazi revolution in Austria. Hitler's mood demanded personal rehabilitation after these set-backs and Ribbentrop, galled and smarting from his diplomatic defeats in London, was in similar case, apt satellite for connivance in violent action. Surrounded by none but wild advisers, Hitler proceeded without delay to the accomplishment of what he described in *Mein Kampf* as his life task: the union of the country of his birth with the Fatherland, the German Reich.

The story of the struggle for Austrian independence concerns us in these pages mainly in its closing stages. An abortive effort to bring about an economic Anschluss in 1931 had been vetoed by the Powers of the Versailles Treaty, who regarded the maintenance of an independent Austria as the cornerstone of their policy in Central Europe. But as soon as Hitler became Chancellor in 1933, his agents set to work stimulating pro-German feeling in Austria with the definite object of creating disorder and unsettled government upon which to found a pretext for intervention by Germany. So serious did acts of Nazi terrorism become that Italy took alarm, and in the Rome Protocols of March 1934, affirmed her interest in maintaining Austrian and Hungarian independence.

In spite of this and of declarations by Great Britain and France strengthening the Rome Agreements, German interference in Austria continued unabated, and in July a rising was staged by the Austrian Nazis, supported by supplies of arms and money from Germany. In the course of it, the Chancellor, Dr. Dollfuss, was cruelly murdered. Mussolini rushed his troops to the frontier on the Brenner Pass. His firmness then, and the staunchness of the Austrian Army, saved Austria and Hitler was obliged to disavow pre-knowledge of the rising and any German implication in the murder of the Chancellor.

After this reverse, it was plain that other means would need to be found for union of Austria with Germany were to be consummated. Germany must be made strong enough to take what she wanted by force; or what would be just as good, by the threat of force. So Hitler threw off "the shackles" ■

"Versailles" one at a time—by rearmament, conscription, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Rhineland re-entry. Still the difficulty of Italian protection of Austria and Hungary remained an insuperable obstacle.

Mussolini was conscious of the strain which sending whole divisions to Spain in support of the rebels would involve, and Abyssinia had been costly. On the other hand, Germany had become again a military power to be reckoned with, and Italian interests in the Mediterranean began to appear more vital than in Central Europe. Nazi intrigues in Austria had intensified, and the new Chancellor, Dr. Kurt von Schuschnigg, appealed to his protector, Mussolini, for advice in face of the pressure of German demands. The latter now took a view different from that which had caused him to declare that the frontiers of Austria were "for ever unchangeable," and advised him to put no difficulties in the way of co-operation between Rome and Berlin: in other words, to make submission to Germany. The result was the Austro-German Agreement of July 11th, 1936, whereby Germany reaffirmed the declaration of the Führer made on May 21st, 1935, recognizing the full sovereignty of Austria. Germany undertook not to interfere in the domestic affairs of Austria, or to seek to influence them, directly or indirectly. But, "the Austrian Government will always maintain her policy in general and especially with reference to the German Reich, based on the principle that arises from her acknowledgment that she is a German State." A memorandum was attached by which the establishment of Nazi organizations would be permitted in Austria, a share of political responsibility given to the Nazis and an amnesty granted to political prisoners.

Mussolini, in effect, had withdrawn his protection and now encouraged Austria to submit to an agreement which left her with merely nominal independence. What could a German policy for Austria, the establishment of Nazi organizations in Austria and the admission of Nazi representatives to a share of political responsibility mean but interference by Germany in the internal affairs of Austria?

In October, the new Italian Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, paid a visit to Berchtesgaden and Hitler promised Germany's recognition of the conquest of Ethiopia. Mussolini followed this friendly act by announcing, on November 1st, the formation of the Rome-Berlin Axis. By this time, both Germany and Italy were committed to the war in Spain, the latter the more deeply of the two.

Meanwhile Dr. Taxis, secretary of the Nazi movement in

Austria, went to his task of disintegration with patience and skill, his subversive activities directed from Berlin. Over the mountains in Czechoslovakia, Konrad Henlein was at work moulding the Sudeten Germans into thorough-going Nazis on the true German pattern. And Mussolini, quarrelling with England over sanctions and weakened by the continual drain of his participation in Franco's war, which was going badly, felt himself more and more impelled towards full co-operation with Hitler, who had now become the stronger of the two by far. The price of that co-operation was acquiescence in the rape of Austria and the annexation of the Sudeten areas. He visited Berlin and Munich in October, 1937, and having agreed to pay the price for his African Empire and ascendancy in the "Italian Sea," he withdrew from the League of Nations and gave his adherence to the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Axis was in full working order.

The path was now cleared for action against Austria. France was rent in twain by domestic strife, enfeebled in her government by rival groups of Communists and anti-Communists. The *Front Populaire* of Léon Blum had collapsed and government after government succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity. Vital British interests in the Far East were endangered by Japan's war in China, and anxious eyes were turned to the Mediterranean, where Italian occupation of Spain's strategic bases threatened British sea routes. The Anschluss became almost a foregone conclusion.

In Vienna, about the time of the Blomberg marriage, a plot was afoot for a new rising organized by Dr. Tavs. Von Papen, former Chancellor, spy and saboteur and, since his escape from the notorious June purge, ambassador of the Reich in Vienna, was to be murdered and responsibility for the rising foisted on to the Austrian Monarchist Party. The resultant disorders were to serve as justification for intervention by German armed forces, who would enter Austria to restore order. Papen, however, got wind of the plot in time, the Government was informed and Dr. Tavs arrested. The whole ramifications of the plot were revealed by a search amongst Dr. Tavs' papers, and documents were found establishing the connection of Rudolf Hess, the Führer's deputy, with the proposed rising. It was in this matter that von Fritsch, protesting against Blomberg's retention of the office of Minister of War after his *mésalliance*, aroused Hitler's resentment by criticism of his Austrian policy. He would refuse to allow the German Army to march.

This happened at the end of January, 1938, and the mis-

carriage of the Taxis' plan, the misfeasance of Blomberg and the revelation of Fritsch's refusal of blind obedience to his Führer, drove Hitler into making the Palace Revolution. He made up his mind to act quickly, to rid himself of all chance of opposition and to displace the recalcitrants and moderates by men who would do his will, whatever the consequences. Ribbentrop, an extremist, bitter against England, amoral and faithless in his diplomacy, imitative of the Führer to the point of absurdity, seemed to be the ideal choice for the post of Foreign Minister for the dictator who was bent on world power or the downfall of Germany.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE FALL OF AUSTRIA; MUNICH AND GODESSBERG

WHEN Ribbentrop became Foreign Minister in February, 1938, the outlook for Austria was indeed perilous in the extreme. France and England were too much concerned with their own troubles and anxieties to be able to put up an effective opposition to the Anschluss, and, at any rate in England, the fate of six and a half million people who were far away and themselves of German blood, seemed of insufficient consequence to warrant intervention. Had the Government wished to intervene, they could certainly not have carried a united nation with them: a fact of which Ribbentrop, after eighteen months in London, was fully cognisant. And Hitler knew that he could count on his trusty friend, Mussolini, to the death—of Austria. No time could have been more opportune, and for Hitler, with moderate opponents out of office and willing accomplices replacing them, it was only a question of what was the best way to do the deed without provoking war.

Papen, the ambassador in Vienna, had been involved in the changes of the Palace Revolution and was on his way to Berlin when he was summoned to Berchtesgaden. There he saw Hitler and Ribbentrop and was told to return at once to Vienna to persuade Schuschnigg to visit the Führer without delay. In this Papen succeeded, by what sneaky wiles can only be guessed; and on February 12th Dr. Schuschnigg reached Ober-salzburg for his interview. He was only partly persuaded that his reception would at least be friendly, but thought that a frank discussion of the relations between his country and Germany would lead to some mitigation of Nazi terrorism and a more accommodating spirit over Germany's demands. He cannot have been completely reassured when Ribbentrop received him with marked coldness of manner and left him to wait in an ante-chamber, where General Keitel and a number of army officers were openly discussing plans for the invasion of his country. On his way, he had seen ample evidence of intense military activity close to the frontier.

He saw Hitler alone and for an hour or more suffered the most violent intimidation. He was bullied, vilified, and brow-beaten by the Führer, who had deliberately worked himself up into an artificial condition of uncontrolled fury bordering on insanity. He shouted ■ him :

" How have you dared all these years to oppress and torture my people—my German people of Austria? . . . God has made me Führer and ruler of every man and woman of German blood in every country on earth . . . you will accept and sign here at once before you leave this house the terms I have prepared for you, or I give the order to march into Austria immediately. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Accompanying his outbursts with alternating paroxysms of tears and rage, he declared that he was " the greatest German who has ever lived."

He introduced Schuschnigg to General von Reichenau, who he said would be in command of the army of occupation in Austria if Schuschnigg did not bow to his will. Handing him the terms of his ultimatum, he told the General to show him the plans for the invasion. At luncheon, besides Hitler and Schuschnigg, there were von Ribbentrop, von Papen, Generals Reichenau and Keitel, and Dr. Guido Schmidt, the false, Austrian-Nazi friend of Schuschnigg. Luncheon finished, the cruel mockery of negotiation, which the *Volkische Beobachter* later described as revealing " a welcome relaxation of the bad feeling between the two German States," continued throughout the afternoon. Ribbentrop became the chief bully now, Hitler sitting apart, sulking in an arm-chair and occasionally coming to life with a frenzied outburst of hysteria when Schuschnigg refused assent to some especially outrageous demand. Ribbentrop employed the technique of the " third degree," storming, threatening and abusing ; while Guido Schmidt gave a traitor's advice, urging abject surrender to every humiliating condition for the betrayal of his country.

The German demands included an amnesty for all Nazis, the surrender of the Ministries of War, Justice, and Education, the appointment ■ Nazis to the Ministries of the Interior and of Security and the transfer of the control of Foreign Affairs by Dr. Schuschnigg to Guido Schmidt.

Schuschnigg fought manfully for terms, but his resistance was overwhelmed. He was deserted by Italy, without hope of support from either France or Britain, and duped by the treachery of his friends. Submission was forced upon him, subject to the constitutional assent of Dr. Miklas, the Austrian President. Ribbentrop wanted to go even further. He tried

<sup>2</sup> *Fallen Bastions*, by G. E. R. Godye, p. 227.

to compel Schuschnigg to give his consent to the adoption by Austria of a policy of hostility towards Czechoslovakia, in line with the policy of Germany. Against this demand, which he asserted would be fatal to Austria for economic reasons, Schuschnigg stood his ground and firmly refused to yield.

He returned to Vienna that night, with two days' grace in which to secure the signature of the President to the surrender. He offered to resign, but President Miklas refused to release him, and within the stipulated time of the ultimatum Guido Schmidt became Foreign Minister and Dr. Seyss-Inquart, a Nazi whom Schuschnigg thought to be of moderate views and an upholder of Austrian independence, accepted the office of Minister of Security. Thus Police, Army and Foreign Affairs were in the hands of the Nazis, and thirty thousand of the outlawed Austrian Legion—terrorists and criminals sheltering in Germany—were free to return to Austria and take vengeance on the loyalists. All that remained to Austria was the worth of the promises which Schuschnigg had managed to extract from Hitler in exchange for his capitulation. These promises were that in his forthcoming speech in the Reichstag, Hitler would repeat the guarantee of Austrian independence contained in the Agreement of July 1936, and that he would warn the Austrian Nazis that they must conform to the laws of the Constitution and sever their connection with similar organizations in Germany.

Dr. Seyss-Inquart, whose name Hitler had pretended not to know during the conversations at Berchtesgaden, flew to Berlin to receive instructions from him for instigating Nazi demonstrations throughout Austria demanding union with the Third Reich. These he commenced to provoke immediately after his return to Vienna. Meanwhile the German Press announced that the meeting of Hitler and Schuschnigg had removed the difficulties of carrying out the Agreement of July 1936 between their two countries and hailed the conversations as proof of a new contribution to the peace of Europe.

On Sunday, February 20th, Hitler spoke in the Reichstag and Austria listened in vain for words which would redeem the promises he had given in exchange for her surrender. There was no reference to her integrity or her independence. Instead of fulfilment, he referred pointedly to two States on Germany's frontiers whose populations included ten million Germans who had once "formed part of a German State." They had never formed part of present-day Germany, but he demanded the right of self-determination for these "tortured" minorities. "It does not lie in the power of man to stop the

rolling stone of fate which, through neglect or folly, has been set moving," he declared. His thoughts, and those of his Foreign Minister, were already dwelling ominously on the three and a half million Germans in the Sudeten areas of Czechoslovakia.

This speech was the signal for the outbreak of the terror which was to be a prelude to the revolution within Austria organized from Berlin. Illegal Nazi demonstrations directed by Seyss-Inquart, twin Judas with Guido Schmidt, were held at Linz, Graz, Innsbruck and other towns. Schuschnigg promptly decreed the prohibition of all political gatherings, but Seyss-Inquart, as Minister of Security, took good care that the police did nothing to suppress them. In a speech in the Austrian Diet the Chancellor declared that Austria would fight for independence "to the death."

The country became united behind Schuschnigg, the Socialists, who had been deprived of their political rights by Dollfuss at Mussolini's behest, uniting with the Nationalists to resist German Nazi aggression. On March 9th, Dr. Schuschnigg showed his mettle by ordering a plebiscite to decide whether Austria should remain independent. It was to be held in four days' time on the issue of "a free, German, independent, Social Austria." He thought that such short notice would leave no time for interference from without.

France at this moment was involved in one of her periodic changes of government. In England, Mr. Eden had resigned and Lord Halifax was newly installed as Foreign Minister for the purpose of opening the way to an agreement with Italy. In the House of Commons, in reply to a question by Mr. Arthur Henderson, Mr. Chamberlain said that he had no statement to make with regard to the proposal to hold a plebiscite in Austria and refused to answer when asked further whether he would not express a hope that the plebiscite would be held without foreign interference or pressure. Austria stood alone, indeed.

The announcement of the intention to hold a plebiscite seemed to take Hitler completely by surprise. There was a practical certainty that, left to themselves, more than two-thirds of the electors would vote for the "German independence" of their country, and there was no time for the German Nazis to organize a terror to counteract the patriotic national fervour that swept over Austria. It was intended all along that union should be brought about without war by a revolt from within which would provide an excuse for German troops to cross the frontier in order to avert bloodshed and restore order. So unexpected was Schuschnigg's sudden stiffening to

resistance that Ribbentrop had felt free to leave Berlin for London, there to present his letters of recall. His first impulse was to return to Germany at once when he heard the astonishing news, but he received instructions from Hitler to remain where he was and to report the official British reaction to the momentous events that were impending.

Seyss-Inquart and a colleague in the Austrian Government, Glaise-Horstenau, visited Berlin, returning on March 11th. They then informed Schuschnigg that if he persisted in holding the plebiscite, Hitler would invade Austria. The threat was repeated by officials of the German Embassy and Schuschnigg was compelled to yield. Under the threat of force he agreed to adjourn the plebiscite. This, however, was not enough and occasioned fresh demands. An ultimatum from Hitler required his resignation and the appointment of Seyss-Inquart as Chancellor in his stead.

Urgent appeals were sent out to Paris, Rome and London, but Mussolini was keeping out of the way, France could not help and, in London, Ribbentrop was wilfully occupying the attention of the Foreign Minister while the Austrian Ambassador made persistent efforts to gain a hearing.

Schuschnigg yielded again because, as he said in his farewell speech, he was not prepared to shed German blood. The ultimatum, repeated thrice, threatened invasion unless the terms were accepted. On March 12th, although submission to every demand that Hitler had made was complete before the expiry of the time limit, German troops and fifteen thousand of the Gestapo with Himmler at their head entered Austria. At Linz on the next day, Hitler announced the Anschluss of Austria and Germany: "I have decided to place the assistance of the Reich at the disposal of the millions of Germans in Austria. Since early to-day the soldiers of German armed forces have been marching over the frontier of German Austria."

In 1935, he said: "Germany neither intends nor wishes to interfere in the internal affairs of Austria, to annex Austria, or to conclude an Anschluss." In 1936: "The lie goes forth again that Germany to-morrow or the day after will fall upon Austria or Czechoslovakia." In the same year Germany concluded an Agreement with Austria by which her independence was guaranteed, and only a month before the Anschluss, Hitler gave his word to Schuschnigg at Berchtesgaden, promising to reinforce that guarantee in his speech to the Reichstag.

Von Ribbentrop did well out of it, for Hitler has the quality of gratitude to subordinates who faithfully render him services

of infamy. There ■ an enormous, old-fashioned castle in Austria, called Fuschl Castle, high up on the edge of the Fuschlsee, one of the famous Salzkammergut Lakes, about ten miles from Salzburg. Hitler gave it to him after the Anschluss, together with the vast estate which surrounds it. It is perhaps needless to say that it did not belong to Hitler, but there was quite a lot of plunder in Austria, including a very welcome gold reserve which was useful to Germany ■ the time. There is good chamois-shooting there and Ribbentrop and his family often stay at the castle, either for holidays or to entertain. The Führer himself has visited him at Fuschl and both Count Csaky, the Hungarian Foreign Minister, and Count Ciano stayed there in the late summer of 1939, on the eve of the conclusion of the German-Soviet Pact.

The new Foreign Minister of the Reich had quickly justified the faith the Führer placed in him. Excepting Schuschnigg's courageous, though belated opposition, there had been no obstacle placed in the way of Hitler's bloodless victory: the changes of February 4th had ensured that in the services as in the Ministries there should be unanimity. Now, as Hitler's speech before the invasion almost openly indicated, it was to be the turn of Czechoslovakia, but that country, with a population of more than fifty millions, highly organized both militarily and industrially, appeared to be a much tougher proposition than Austria. Nevertheless, with the disappearance of the Austrian bulwark, the future of Czechoslovakia became the subject of the gravest apprehensions.

On March 11th, M. Mastny, the Czechoslovak Minister in Berlin, was instructed by his Government to ask for assurances. Field-Marshal Goering pledged his "word of honour" that Germany had no hostile intentions against Czechoslovakia. Later on the same day he repeated this, as he did again on the 12th, the day of the invasion of Austria. Ribbentrop, it will be remembered, had gone to London, and in his absence Neurath informed M. Mastny in the Führer's name that Germany had no hostile intentions against his country. Yet again, on March 13th, Goering made the same unequivocal pronouncement to M. Mastny and the next day, with the consent of the German Government, Mr. Chamberlain communicated these assurances to the House ■ Commons.

The Henleinists, however, had been given a powerful impetus by the "liberation" of the Germans ■ Austria and by Hitler's reference to the Sudeten Germans ■ his speech of February 20th. He had then declared in the Reichstag that he would not "tolerate the continued oppression of three and a

half million Germans." Unfortunately, and perhaps significantly, on several occasions on which Herr Hitler had disclaimed any intention to interfere with frontiers, both Czechoslovakia and Austria had been mentioned in the same breath. Now that Austria had been swallowed, assurances lost much of their value, particularly as the annexation had brought Germany's frontier up to a vulnerable part of Czechoslovakia.

France, however, was bound by treaty to aid Czechoslovakia if she were attacked and Mr. Chamberlain, not wholly reassured by the five separate declarations made to M. Mastny, ventured the opinion in the House of Commons that if war broke out over the Sudeten question, it would be quite impossible to say where it would end. He referred to the long associations of friendship between France and Great Britain and the identity of their ideals of democratic liberty, giving the impression that if Germany should attack Czechoslovakia and if France were obliged to fulfil her treaty obligations by going to war, Great Britain would become involved.

Hitler's interest in Czechoslovakia had quickened in 1935, when he had established communication with Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten German Party, which had been founded by him when the former Nazi Party in Czechoslovakia was disbanded. But although there was undoubtedly a Sudeten question, and although the German minority in Czechoslovakia suffered under certain grievances, their situation was regarded, until shortly before the Anschluss, as a domestic problem capable of a reasonable settlement. The Sudeten Germans were, in fact, much better treated by the Czechs than the German minorities in either Italy or Poland. Nevertheless, Hitler had set his mind upon the incorporation of the Sudetenland within the Reich and, in furtherance of his ambitions and until a favourable situation could be created, Henlein could be used to exacerbate the feelings of the minority and fan the feeble flame of resistance to oppression.

Early in 1937, the Czech Government had amended the Minority Laws and made certain valuable though not far-reaching concessions. They failed to satisfy Henlein, and by the end of the year there was growing up between the Sudeten German Party and the Government a situation of considerable tension. The deterioration in the economic condition of the German minority since 1930 and the spread of unemployment, had aggravated their grievances, certain industries having been transferred from the areas to other parts of Czechoslovakia. But, until Hitler's speech on February 20th, shortly before the

invasion of Austria, their claim was rather for the provision of some degree of home rule than a demand for self-determination. The speech, however, while causing grave apprehensions amongst the Czechs regarding Germany's intentions, resulted also in a much greater increase in the tension between the Czechs and the Sudeten Germans. It may be, as Lord Runciman wrote in his report, that the rise of Nazi Germany gave the minority for the first time hope of redress, whereas before they had been both hopeless and powerless to alter their circumstances. And when the Führer spoke of ten million Germans who were being tortured in two neighbouring States, demands which were capable of settlement within the frontiers of the State soon developed into a clamour for separation.

After the speech, Dr. Hodza, the Czech Premier, expressed the willingness of his Government to enter into friendly negotiations with the Henleinists, but at the same time made a public declaration of the inviolability of the Czech frontiers. After the Anschluss, the Sudeten demands expanded to become wholly inconsistent with the sovereignty of the Czech Government, and whatever suspicions may have been entertained at that time, subsequent events afford the fullest proof that the more irreconcilable policy then adopted by Henlein was made and concerted in Berlin.

The preservation of the Republic ethnographically was of first strategic importance to the peace and security of Central Europe, and it became still more vital after the annexation of Austria. Her frontiers at the western extremity, protruding into Germany, formed a bastion against encroachment from the west which had been maintained for centuries, and provided an effective barrier to the German *drang nach Osten*. For that reason, the Western Powers could not lightly contemplate changes which would decrease the value of her position athwart the passage to the Hungarian plains ; but for that same reason also, if Germany were to attempt to extend her dominance over the Danube States, the removal of that barrier was of even greater importance to the men who directed the foreign policy of Germany. It may well be doubted whether the tears that Hitler was wont to shed at the thought of the tortures ■ the German minority in Czechoslovakia sprang from any deeper moral feelings than did his acquiescence in the far greater tortures of the Germans within the frontiers of Italy. But in the case of the Sudetenland, it is conceivable that visions of the freedom of movement for the acquisition ■ future *lebensraum*, which possession of the disputed areas would give ■ Germany, occasioned an acute sense of distress

in the Führer which would not have been caused if the territories in question had been of no strategic value. France and Russia had certainly recognized the necessity of maintaining intact the Czechoslovakian obstacle to German aggression by their alliances, but the policy of Great Britain was directed more to preserving peace at almost any cost by appeasing the totalitarian States. It was recognized in England that in some cases there may have been injustices inflicted upon them, and amongst a large and important body of opinion the view was held that by making concessions to the dictators where any reason could be adduced for redress, they might in time become satisfied.

Hitler, in fact, played up to this opinion and, as with the carrot which tantalizes the donkey, repeatedly held out the prospect of near satisfaction of his hunger. Unfortunately, his words were too often taken at their face value when he said that "after this Germany has no more territorial claims," or announced that "the period of surprises is now ended"; and Britain's statesmen evidently thought that the policy of filling the brute to repletion was worth a trial; several trials actually. Indeed, over the rape of Austria, there was a marked disposition to excuse German action, or at any rate to accept the fact of it philosophically, because when all was considered, the Austrians themselves were really Germans. Nevertheless, opinion was shocked at the excesses committed by the Nazis in Vienna after the occupation and there was general condemnation of the violent methods employed.

In the same way, when the Sudeten question suddenly became acute, there appeared to be some grounds for sympathy with the minority, however specious in reality Germany's claim to interfere might really be. After a period of futile negotiation between Henlein and the Czechs, the former outlined his proposals for a settlement in a speech at Karlsbad. He produced a programme consisting of eight points which went much further than any of his previous demands, and two of the points were such as the Czechs could not in any eventuality concede. The other six points had already been agreed in principle; a fact which affords evidence of the conciliatory attitude of the Czech Government. They involved the grant of full self-government, full equality of status as between Czech and German, and the appointment of German officials and police in districts which were preponderantly German. But when he demanded the recognition of the Sudeten Germans as "a legal personality," he was striking a blow at the foundations of the Constitution. He wanted to transform the

Sudetenland into a totalitarian, National-Socialist State within the State itself, and he added supplementary points requiring a complete reversal of the foreign policy of Czechoslovakia. If these were conceded, the minority of three and a half million Germans would have the right to dictate to the whole community. Czechoslovakia was to withdraw from the pacts which she had made with France, with the Soviets and with her partners in the Little Entente: pacts which could not serve as a base for aggression but could only operate if the parties to them were themselves attacked. And the motive behind the Eight Points was still more clearly revealed in the demand that Czechoslovakia must not be made a "bulwark against Germanism."

While the negotiations continued, the German Press which, unlike the free Press of the democratic countries, has its opinions dictated to it by the Nazi official Press Chief, carried on a violent campaign of vilification of the Czechs and of their President, Dr. Benes, in line with the outrageous utterances of the Führer. Incidents were created to bolster up a case of oppression of the German minority and exaggerated to almost unbelievable proportions. If a German were assaulted in a drunken brawl, with no political significance whatsoever, the incident would be magnified into an affair of national importance and astronomical figures of killed and injured would appear in the German news. Hitler spoke of millions of tortured Germans, of hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing across the border into Germany from an imaginary terror, and the newspapers recorded chimerical numbers of martyred dead. Yet, Lord Runciman, who left Prague in September, was able then to compute the total of fatal casualties on both sides at no more than seventy.

It is the opinion of many observers that if Hitler had thought it would be necessary for Germany to involve herself in war to attain her objectives in Austria and in Czechoslovakia, he would not have shrunk from making the decision. His task with Austria had been rendered comparatively simple by the confidence with which Ribbentrop was able to reassure him of the absence of risk of a widespread conflagration. Until the beginning of May, although Ribbentrop was fully convinced that Britain would not go to war for the sake of Czechoslovakia and that France, without Britain intervening, would not fulfil her treaty obligations to assist against aggression, Hitler does not seem to have been willing to take the risk. The Czech defences were formidable, their army strong and efficient and well supplied by the Skoda armament factory. But early in

May there was published in the *Montreal Star* a report by an American journalist of a conversation at a dinner-party in which Mr. Chamberlain was said to have expressed the opinion that Britain would not fight in defence of Czechoslovakia — that country were attacked; and that neither France nor Russia would go to her help despite their defensive pacts. He was reported to have hinted at the need for revision of the Czech frontiers and to have given it as his view that Czechoslovakia could not survive in its present form.

To what extent this report influenced Hitler and Ribbentrop, only they can say. But Professor Seton-Watson considers that it had a decisive effect upon them.<sup>1</sup> Publication followed immediately after the State visit of Hitler, Ribbentrop and Goebbels to Mussolini in Rome on May 7th, when Hitler boasted of the creation of a block of 120 million people in Europe "resolved to safeguard their eternal rights." Hitler felt himself strengthened by the promise by Mussolini of Italy's diplomatic support, and considered also that the report in the *Montreal Daily Star* confirmed everything that Ribbentrop had told him of the weakness of British policy.

Soon after his return from Rome, German troop concentrations on the Czech frontier caused alarm in Prague. The British Ambassador in Berlin sought information about these movements but was told officially by the Secretary of State, on the authority of General Keitel, that there was no foundation whatever for the persistent reports of any unusual concentrations.

Ribbentrop was greatly annoyed that Sir Nevile Henderson had not looked to him in the first instance for the information which it was his duty to seek, and told him that in future no military information would be afforded to him. At this interview he used the most "bloodthirsty language" regarding the Czechs and promised that they would be exterminated, "women and children and all."<sup>2</sup> Such a threat on the lips of the Foreign Minister of a great and powerful country is in itself a terrible commentary on the type — man in Germany who to-day threatens the existence of every State in Europe. What would follow that world supremacy for which Germany is striving can readily be imagined when to Ribbentrop's words are added the aerial menaces of Goering, the wild utterances — Goebbels, the long-stored vengeance of the half-mad Führer and the nameless horrors of Himmler's sinister Gestapo. But in this instance Ribbentrop seems to have

<sup>1</sup> *From Munich to Danzig*, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Failure of a Mission*, by Sir Nevile Henderson.

overreached himself, for he ■ reported to have met with a severe rebuke from Hitler and to have fallen from favour for a time.

The ambassador, later on the same day, warned Ribbentrop that aggression would involve the fulfilment by France of her treaty obligations to Czechoslovakia and that Britain might thereby become involved. The warning, and the earlier incidents, affected the Foreign Minister's temper, which ■ easily roused ; but to the actual causes which led to a change ■ plan by Hitler—if his intention was then to effect a lightning coup, which is by no means certain—other happenings may have contributed more heavily.

The more important of these were, first, a declaration by the French that if Germany crossed the Czech frontier, France would furnish help to the utmost ; and, secondly, the partial mobilization of the Czech Army on the night of May 20-21, carried out with admirable smoothness and efficiency and depriving any intended attack of the vital element of surprise. Another fortuitous circumstance was also taken seriously in Berlin. An official of the Embassy happened to be going on leave and a colleague took the opportunity to send his own family away. Others followed suit and the sudden reservation of train accommodation led to the belief that officials were evacuating their families in fear of a crisis developing which might end in hostilities. Yet, in spite of these signs that offensive action would provoke war, Ribbentrop still continued to assure Hitler that Britain had no intention of fighting on behalf of the Czechs and that France would think twice about it before involving herself.

Whatever may be the truth about German preparations to proceed by force to a settlement of the dispute in May, nothing happened ; but the Press of the world joined in hailing the failure of a realization of Czech fears of an invasion, as a signal defeat for Hitler. This enraged him and quite upset the balance of his unstable mind. Goebbels has since stated that on May 28th Hitler took the decision to effect a seizure of the Sudeten districts by armed force, and Hitler himself says that he then determined that the German troops should march on October 2nd.

The crisis of May 21st had, however, made clear to Hitler the need for long and careful preparation ■ force were to be used. There was then no Siegfried Line to oppose a French counterstroke in support of their ally in the East, and the work of construction was put in hand at once and continued with feverish haste throughout the summer. To veil these sinister

activities, Henlein was instructed by Ribbentrop to renew the negotiations with the Czech Government which had been suspended during the crisis. Yet the last thing that either he or the Führer wanted now was that those negotiations should result in an agreement. The policy to be pursued was to put forward demands which must be so atrociously exorbitant that no self-respecting Government could possibly accede to them ; as was done later in the approach to the seizure of the rest of Czechoslovakia and, again, when Poland was confronted by Ribbentrop's corrupt diplomacy. A real agreement might defeat the object for which he strove—a breach which would give the pretext for annexation.

The Czechs were in the unfortunate position of being subjected to pressure by France and Great Britain on the one hand and by intimidation from Berlin on the other, while within the State, the Sudeten German Party fomented discontent, provoked incidents as evidence of a Czech terror and openly flouted the law. MM. Daladier and Bonnet, with Mr. Chamberlain, agreed that the Czechs must be persuaded to reach a peaceful settlement. In pursuance of this, the British and French Ministers in Prague urged the Czech Foreign Minister to go to the utmost limit of concession in satisfying the Sudeten demands ; and Sir Nevile Henderson reported to von Ribbentrop this effort to compel the Czechs to find a solution, adding, however, his hope that Germany would adopt similar measures of conciliation with Henlein. The reply showed the uncompromising attitude of the Nazi Minister. He agreed that the pressure put upon Czechoslovakia would be useful, but only if ■ succeeded in persuading the Czechs to accept Henlein's demands. That meant that he was not prepared to bring any like pressure to bear on Henlein.

In July, Captain Wiedermann came to London from Berlin on a secret mission and held mysterious conversations with Lord Halifax, but no information as to what passed was vouchsafed by the Foreign Office. It was said that the visit, which took place just after Daladier had again categorically reaffirmed France's solemn undertakings in respect of Czechoslovakia, was kept secret because it had been arranged in Germany without the knowledge of von Ribbentrop. Nevertheless, a few days later, Mr. Chamberlain announced in Parliament that Lord Runciman was going to Prague, not as an arbitrator, but as an investigator and mediator, acting "only in his personal capacity."

Throughout July and August, German troops gathered for manoeuvres on so great a scale that ■ became apparent that

mischief was brewing. By the middle of August, Germany was practically mobilized on a war footing, and Sir Neville Henderson gave warning to Ribbentrop, Goering and Goebbels on several occasions that these abnormal concentrations could only be interpreted as a threat to Czechoslovakia endangering the peace of Europe. Attention was centred on the forthcoming Nürnberg Rally on September 12th, at which Hitler was expected to make some declaration which would decide the issue of the crisis.

On September 7th, the now famous *Times* leader appeared, wherein it was suggested that if the Sudetens did not find themselves at ease within the Republic, "it might be as well for the Czechoslovak Government to consider whether a solution should not be sought on some totally different lines, which would make Czechoslovakia an entirely homogeneous State by the secession of that fringe of alien populations who are contiguous to the nations with which they are united by race."

The Foreign Office promptly issued a statement denying that the opinions expressed in the leader represented its views, but in Berlin it was immediately seized upon as indicative of the real attitude of the British Government. It corresponded closely to the report of Mr. Chamberlain's remarks previously published in the *Montreal Daily Star* and confirmed in every respect the advice Ribbentrop had consistently given regarding Britain's disinterestedness in Czechoslovakia.

The effect was at once apparent. At Moravska-Ostrava, on the Czech border, a trivial incident was magnified a hundred-fold and used as an excuse by Henlein for breaking off negotiations with the Czech Government. At Nürnberg, Hitler accused Czechoslovakia and President Benes of the torture of the Sudetens and of seeking their extermination, and demanded for them the right of self-determination. Following the speech, Henlein, throwing over his own eight points, openly declared for separation and fled to Germany, where he commenced the formation of a Sudeten Legion.

Believing that Hitler was now contemplating an immediate invasion of Czechoslovakia, Mr. Chamberlain proposed a personal visit to the Führer, which the British Ambassador forthwith arranged with Ribbentrop. He arrived at Munich on September 15th and, accompanied by von Ribbentrop, drove at once to Berchtesgaden where, in the presence only of an interpreter, an interview took place lasting three hours. At this, Hitler declared that the only basis for a solution ■ the problem was "self-determination": a basis which implied

cession of an undefined area of Czechoslovakia to Germany. The Prime Minister accepted the principle, and a further meeting was arranged to take place after he had consulted the Cabinet.

The result was a hurried meeting between representatives of the French and British Governments and the formulation of the Anglo-French proposals which were presented to the Czech Government on September 19th. These proposals amounted ■ a demand that Czechoslovakia should ■ once agree to the transfer to Germany of such areas as were mainly inhabited by Sudeten Deutsch, i.e. areas with over 50 per cent of German inhabitants. The hope was expressed that it would be possible to arrange by negotiation for adjustment of frontiers by "some international body, including a Czech representative," and H.M. Government offered to join in an international guarantee of the new boundaries of the State against unprovoked aggression.

The Czechs, however, regarded the Anglo-French plan, drafted without consulting its representatives, as "tantamount to mutilation," and as threatening the economic, political and strategic existence of the State. In rejecting the proposals, they invoked the German-Czechoslovakia Arbitration Treaty, the validity of which only in March Germany had reaffirmed.

In July, France had informed the Prague Government that although the Franco-Czech Agreement was still regarded as effective, she could not bind herself to fulfil her obligations unless Britain was also ready to join in defending Czechoslovakia against attack. Now, both Britain and France required immediate and unconditional acceptance of their plan.

The Czech Government, in face of this pressure by their friends, had to surrender. Assistance from the Russians depended upon French fulfilment; France in turn would only implement her promises ■ Britain—bound by no treaty—were prepared to march by her side; and neither the British Cabinet nor the British public wanted war. On September 21st Czechoslovakia accepted the Anglo-French proposals. Ribbentrop's estimate had proved correct: about France as well as about Great Britain.

Fortified by the submission of the Czechs, Mr. Chamberlain returned to Germany, expecting only a friendly, though arduous, discussion of the details of the settlement. With Ribbentrop he drove from the aerodrome to the Führer's hotel at Godesberg. As all the world knows, Hitler, with

Ribbentrop at his elbow, broke faith with the Prime Minister, retracted the Berchtesgaden terms and put forward new demands in a memorandum which amounted to a Dictate. Mr. Chamberlain expressed his indignation but undertook to submit the memorandum to Prague.

Again France and Russia renewed their undertakings to support Czechoslovakia and, on the next day, the Czechs commenced to mobilize. Similar action by the French, the mobilization of the British Fleet and a resumption of staff talks, strengthened Czech determination and their Government rejected the memorandum. Yet the Prime Minister's return to London did not mean that negotiations were completely at an end. Hitler, on the advice of the evil genius who has since led him into his fatal attack on Poland, was ready to gamble on a war in which Great Britain and France would be fighting in support of the Czechs, but his General Staff were strongly opposed to provoking a conflict the issue of which seemed to them to invite defeat. Ribbentrop headed the war-mongers, anxious in his small, vindictive mind to level up accounts with England, the country in which he had suffered rebuffs and the humiliation of his failure as ambassador. Sir Nevile Henderson recounts that at a meeting of Hitler and his advisers, " Goering vehemently accused Ribbentrop of inciting to war," and that the irate Field-Marshal called him a " criminal fool,"<sup>1</sup>—an epithet which aptly describes the man who, by his foul methods of diplomacy, his gross breaches of faith and his utter recklessness, carries the heaviest load of responsibility of all, save Hitler, for the war to which Germany stands committed.

Hitler had announced on September 27th—the day before orders were given for the mobilization of the British Fleet—that Germany would mobilize on the 29th ■ the terms of the Godesberg Memorandum had not then been accepted by the Czech Government. An important factor was that, in spite of the Axis, there were but few signs of active preparation for war by the Italians, and Chamberlain continued his efforts at mediation by sending an emissary in the person of Sir Horace Wilson, and by means of personal letters addressed to the Führer. He proposed that immediate discussions, in which Britain was ready to take part, should take place between Germany and Czechoslovakia, but Hitler remained unyielding. His reply of September 27th, however, contained a declaration of his readiness to give " a formal guarantee for the remainder of Czechoslovakia " : a guarantee which was broken six months later.

Again, on September 28th, the Prime Minister wrote to Hitler, expressing his own certainty that "you can get all essentials without war and without delay." Further, he announced his readiness to take part in a Four-Power Conference with representatives of France and Italy, and urged Signor Mussolini to "inform the German Chancellor that you are willing to be represented."

On the same day he was able to announce in the House of Commons that Hitler had invited him to a meeting with Mussolini and Daladier in Munich. He added: "I need not say what my answer will be."

The war party of Ribbentrop, Goebbels and Himmler had suffered a heavy reverse.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CZECHOSLOVAKIA

THROUGHOUT the Four-Power discussions at Munich, Ribbentrop endeavoured to harden Hitler into refusing to concede the smallest departure from the Godesberg ultimatum, but in this he was foiled partly by the attitude of Signor Mussolini and even more by counsels of moderation urged by influential Nazis in Germany. The majority of the people knew nothing of the Sudetens and cared less, and there was an evident lack of enthusiasm for a general war which compelled the Führer to compromise. According to the French Ambassador in Berlin, opinions held in German high political circles influenced Goering and prevailed over Ribbentrop.

Yet, although his bellicose influence failed to bring the result he desired, Munich advanced him materially in the estimation of the Führer, for the reason that what he advocated was more delectable to Hitler than the warnings of Goering and others. Ribbentrop believed that the autumn of 1938 was the opportune moment to take advantage of Germany's military superiority, particularly her supremacy in the air ; and Hitler would have preferred to take the Sudetenland by force of arms in a spectacular, lightning *comp*, rather than as the result of a negotiated agreement. They would have liked to repeat their Austrian triumph on an even more impressive scale, but the mobilization of the British Fleet, the measures taken by the French, the Russian-Czech solidarity—above all, the fact that Italy could not be wholly depended upon, for Mussolini was not completely master in his own house—reinforced the opposition to the war party of Ribbentrop and caused Hitler to yield, much against his will.

The Munich Agreement, which was received in Britain and France with undisguised relief, and Mr. Chamberlain's part in negotiating it, have been heavily criticized in this country as the cowardly sacrifice of a small, independent nation to the greed of the Nazi monster, but there is no evidence to show that in September 1938, Hitler and Ribbentrop would have shrunk from plunging Europe into war if a compromise had not been

effected. Hitler secured the substance of his current demands by the threat of war, but in the final agreement was obliged to retreat from the *Diktat* of Godesberg upon points which, on paper, were of considerable importance. And, on paper, there appeared to be a possibility that the Munich Agreement might end the state of undeclared war from which Europe had suffered ever since the Nazis came to power in Germany. Inasmuch as it was reached by the attendant statesmen without Ribbentrop being allowed to make of it an even more abject surrender than it was, we may regard its details as beyond our scope ; but not what followed it.

The ultimate success, or otherwise, of the Agreement depended upon the intentions of two men in Germany : the Führer and his Foreign Minister. If the Sudeten problem was what Hitler on September 26th described as " the last problem which must be solved," Czechoslovakia's enforced surrender would not be altogether in vain. But in view of what was yet to come, it is worth while to repeat here his assurance to Mr. Chamberlain : " I assured him, moreover, and I repeat it here, that when this problem is solved, there will be no more territorial problems for Germany in Europe ; and I further assured him that from the moment when Czechoslovakia solves its problems, that is to say, when the Czechs have come to an arrangement with their other minorities, peacefully, without oppression, I shall no longer be interested in the Czech State. And this I guarantee. We don't want any Czechs at all."

Neither Great Britain, however, in spite of the supplementary joint declaration which Chamberlain and Hitler signed, purporting " to contribute to assure the peace of Europe," nor yet France was wholly reassured. In the House of Commons, stress was laid upon the importance of pressing onward with the rearmament programme, and in France Munich was taken as a warning. It was recognized that if further recurrent crises were to be avoided, all causes of internal weakness in France must be removed and gaps in her armament quickly filled up.

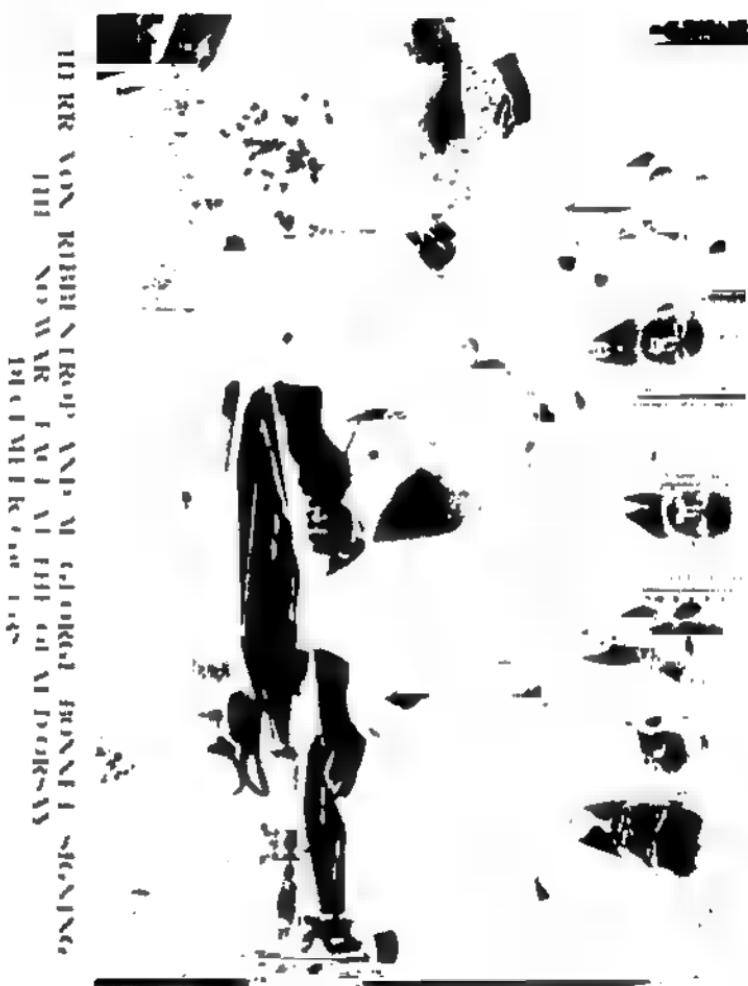
The two men upon whose will to peace Europe's future was staked showed but small signs of changing their ravenous natures. In the subsequent delineation of the new Czech-Hungarian frontier, Ribbentrop and Count Ciano, who made the Vienna Award, did not always see eye to eye and in at least one important instance the German Foreign Minister was forced to give way before the firmness of the Italian. Disappointment, following his efforts to bring about the complete mutilation of Czechoslovakia, induced in him a mood of per-

sistent vindictiveness towards that unhappy country, and soon ■ became plain that the Munich Agreement was not worth the paper it was written on. It had been Mr. Chamberlain's hope that it would bring to Czechoslovakia "a greater security than she had ever enjoyed in the past." On the other hand, in the opinion of Mr. Winston Churchill, it represented "a total and unmitigated defeat."

As early as October 4th, six days after Munich, M. François-Poncet wrote to the French Foreign Minister saying that "At the very moment when the German Army ■ occupying the mountains which have hitherto been the historic frontiers of Bohemia, they are scanning the horizon in search of new demands to formulate, new battles to fight out, new prizes to conquer." The speech of the Führer at Saarbrücken on October 9th showed clearly that he would regard British and French interest in the affairs of Czechoslovakia as "governessy" interference in a private problem of Germany's own.

The forces of disruption were quickly set in motion in the truncated Republic. The Henleinists initiated a reign of terror in the transferred territories and, during November, persecution of the Jews reached a pitch which rivalled anything that had been seen in Germany or in Vienna. But French statesmen, following Chamberlain's example, had detected faint possibilities of a Franco-German understanding; and Hitler asserted his readiness to sign an agreement recognizing the permanence of the existing frontiers of the two countries and providing for the settlement of differences between them by the method of consultation. Ribbentrop drafted certain plans for the fulfilment of these amicable suggestions and M. François-Poncet was invited to Berchtesgaden. The result was that on December 6th, von Ribbentrop signed in Paris the Franco-German Declaration whereby the two nations, in his words, "agreed to put an end to the age-long conflicts concerning their frontier and to establish good neighbourly relations in the future."

M. Bonnet, during Ribbentrop's visit, took the opportunity of pressing upon him the view that any attempt to develop Franco-German relations appeared futile without a corresponding effort to improve relations between the Reich and Great Britain. Characteristically, Ribbentrop threw all the blame upon the British Government, with which he said he was most disappointed after the Munich discussions. He resented the attitude of Mr. Duff Cooper, Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden, and of the newspapers towards Germany, and said that only the



WIR VON RUHR-REICH UND WIRKEND WURDEN HEUTE



struggle against Bolshevism was the basis of the Rome-Berlin Axis and of Germany's action in Spain. He did not see any reason why the existence of the Axis should prevent harmony between the four Great Powers and urged their co-operation in the struggle against Communism.

The Franco-German conversations, however, whilst meeting with the approval of the peoples of both nations, did not bring any appreciable improvement in their relations. The very fact that Germany was still tilting at the Franco-Soviet Pact and wished to set at ease the mind of the French nation by removing fears of frontier disputes, seemed to indicate that Hitler was only putting aside the idea of conquest in the West in favour of expansion in the East. There was much to support this view. Ribbentrop had spoken to the French Ambassador in Berlin of "the creation of zones of influence in the East and South-East," and now that annexation of the Sudetenland had, Danzig excepted, practically completed the incorporation of Germans on foreign soil within the Reich, the demand for *Lebensraum* was beginning to arise. Pressure was being exercised, both in Czechoslovakia and Hungary, for customs and currency unions, and if Czechoslovakia could be reduced to vassalage, it would open the way to a new partition of Poland and the eventual exploitation of the Ukraine. As regards Czechoslovakia, there was as yet unfulfilled the international guarantee her frontiers promised in the Munich Agreement and Germany showed no disposition to carry out its provisions in this respect. In Paris, Ribbentrop had declared his intention to re-examine the question but conveniently forgot it on his return to Berlin.

In January 1939 M. Chvalkovsky, the Czech Foreign Minister, visited Berlin to raise the question of the guarantee. Ribbentrop stated emphatically that it was not possible to give a German guarantee to a State which does not eliminate the Jews. "Do not imitate the sentimental and leisurely manner in which we ourselves treated this problem," he reported to have said aggressively. "Our kindness [sic] was nothing but weakness, and we regret it. This vermin must be destroyed. The Jews are our sworn enemies and at the end of this year there will not be a Jew left in Germany. . . . We will give similar advice to Rumania, Hungary, etc. . . . Germany will seek to form a bloc of anti-Semitic States, as she would not be able to treat as friends the States in which the Jews, either through their economic activity or through their high positions, could exercise any kind of influence."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 43 (Hutchinson & Co., Ltd.).

Hitler, therefore, who gave his solemn assurance after Munich that he would no longer be interested in the Czechs, now demanded the right to exclude all Jews from Czechoslovakia! He went further than that, however, and Ribbentrop laid down the following conditions for the guarantee of Czechoslovak frontiers, promised at and reiterated after Munich :

Complete neutrality of Czechoslovakia, whose foreign policy must be brought into line with that of the Reich.

Czechoslovakia to leave the League of Nations and adhere to the anti-Comintern Pact.

Drastic reduction of military effectives.

Part of the gold reserve to be ceded to Germany and the currency from the Sudeten to be exchanged for Czechoslovak raw materials.

The Czechoslovak markets must be open to the German-Sudeten industries and no new industries may be created to compete with existing industries in the Sudetenland.

Dismissal of all Czechoslovak Government employees who may have given Germany cause for complaint.

The German and Italian Governments had agreed at Munich to join in an international guarantee against unprovoked aggression as soon as the question of the Polish and Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia had been settled. These preliminary conditions had been carried out in the Vienna Award under the mediation of Herr von Ribbentrop and Count Ciano. Now, because Hungary and Poland as well as Germany were dissatisfied with the Vienna Award, Hitler refused Germany's guarantee. In a note to the French Embassy in Berlin, dated February 28th, 1939,<sup>1</sup> Ribbentrop went even further and rejected the conception of a guarantee of Czechoslovak frontiers by the Western Powers, "as an element liable to encourage unreasonable tendencies." After alluding to difficulties between Hungary and Poland, on the one hand, and Czechoslovakia on the other, the note continued : "The German Government are perfectly aware that, all things considered, the general evolution in that part of Europe falls primarily into the sphere of the Reich's most vital interests, and that not only from the historical point of view, but also from the geographical and, above all, from the economic angle."

In the words of M. Coulondre, Ribbentrop claimed that all

that part ■ Europe henceforward is a preserve of the Reich, and the Western Powers have no longer any right to interest themselves in Central European affairs. And Ribbentrop, referring to a recent visit by Mr. Chamberlain to Rome in furtherance of his policy of appeasement, and to the progress of the negotiations for a settlement of Franco-Italian differences, made it his business to convince the Czech Foreign Minister that his Government could look for no support from the Western Powers against Germany. He assured him that he could hope for no change in the Czechoslovak frontiers and that, so long as Mr. Chamberlain remained in power, Great Britain would never risk war. Czechoslovakia, in his opinion, was completely at the mercy of Germany.

The Czechs were prepared to eliminate non-Czech Jews and also Jewish *émigrés* since 1933 and, further, to limit the number of Jews allowed in the professions. Their proposals, however, were not acceptable to Ribbentrop and they were forced to submit to the German demands.

Full realization of the utter worthlessness of Hitler's promises and of Ribbentrop's cynical and treacherous diplomacy only came when the rest of Czechoslovakia was occupied by German troops on March 15th, 1939. For this act of brigandage and bad faith there could be no conceivable excuse. Until then, in each violent surge of Nazi power politics, apologists might put forward some kind of a case in extenuation of German action. For instance, when Germany rearmed, one might say that it was wrong to keep a proud nation for ever unarmed. When the Rhineland was fortified, though treaties were torn up, Germany was but exercising sovereign rights over her own territory. In the cases of the Austrians and the Sudetens they were, after all, Germans who were not averse from joining their brothers of the Reich.

But the seizure of Czechoslovakia can have no justification ■ any kind, whether moral, historical, or ethnographical. On the contrary, it signified the abandonment of the ethnographical principle in virtue of which Germany had achieved the Anschluss and obtained the transfer of the Sudetenland. At Munich it had been a cardinal point in the German claim that ■ was impossible for Czech and German to live together in peace within the frontiers ■ one State. Germany did not wish to incorporate alien elements in the Reich. Six months later, eight million Czechs are forcibly taken into Germany and compelled to live, not in harmony with, but in subjection to, seventy million Germans; the German negotiators having already made it clear that the two races

cannot be together in peace. If it was wrong for three and a half million Germans to live in Czechoslovakia, it could not be right that eight million Czechs should be forced to live in Germany. And, after the cession of the Sudetenland, there were but 500,000 Germans left within the Republic.

Besides being a complete reversal of principle, the seizure merited condemnation for the base and infamous methods by which it was brought about, and on account of the violation of a string of promises and assurances given repeatedly by Hitler, Goering and Neurath. Already, with the Sudetenland claim, the value of Goering's word of honour, Hitler's promises and Neurath's assurances had been fully assessed. Moreover, the validity of the German-Czech Arbitration Treaty recognized by Neurath at the time of the Anschluss, had been repudiated. But only in September Hitler had declared that the Sudetenland "is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe." Munich brought not only "Peace with Honour," but two distinct disavowals of further territorial ambitions vouchsafed by Hitler to Mr. Chamberlain. And barely six months elapsed before Neurath, who pledged his word and Germany's, became the German Protector ruling in Prague the counterfeit "autonomous Protectorate" of Bohemia-Moravia.

Although German preparations for annexing the rest of Czechoslovakia began to take shape almost immediately after Munich, it was not until March 1939 that the opportunity presented itself for Germany to intervene. Barely keeping up the pretence of non-interference, the procedure which was rapidly becoming stereotyped was faithfully carried out in the encouragement of separatist elements in Slovakia. After Munich, Czechoslovakia had become a Federation of three autonomous States: Bohemia-Moravia, Slovakia, and Ruthenia. The leader of the Autonomist Party in Slovakia, Monsignor Hlinka, had died in August 1938 and was succeeded by Father Tiso, a political weakling. As in the Sudetenland, the Nazis followed their established practice of beginning by undermining the State which they were about to destroy.

In October, the Czechoslovak Constitution was revised and Slovakia obtained a separate Parliament in Bratislava. Finance, the army and Foreign Policy, however, remained in the hands of the Federal Government of Dr. Hacha, the President, and Mr. Beran, the Premier, in Prague; but nevertheless, Tiso found ready support from Ribbentrop in Berlin for a separatist policy. Ribbentrop played a double game, covertly encouraging Tiso whilst following superficially a policy of co-operation with Prague. He offered to help

Father Tiso in return for a projected customs union with the Reich and the adoption of German currency in an independent State of Slovakia.

On March 9th, 1939, Tiso's provincial Government came out into the open with demands for a separate army, a separate Foreign Office and diplomatic representation in foreign countries. Dr. Hacha communicated with von Ribbentrop, proposing immediate drastic action against the separatists and, meeting with no opposition from Berlin, took energetic measures to suppress the movement. The extremist Slovak Ministers, Tiso, Durcansky and two others, were dismissed and the Slovak guard disarmed. Durcansky fled to Vienna, and there, under the direction of Goebbels and Seyss-Inquart, opened a violent campaign of calumny against the Prague Government, alleging Czech atrocities against Slovaks and Germans in Slovakia and urging Slovak claims to complete independence. On the invitation of Ribbentrop, Tiso crossed the frontier and hurried to Berlin.

The Government in Prague had the situation well in hand, and apart from a few unimportant scuffles, there was practically no disorder. But, with the full support of the German Government, and to the accompaniment of violent outbursts in the German Press and false accusations of Czech oppression and murder, Father Tiso returned to Bratislava and, on March 14th, proclaimed the independence of Slovakia. He appointed Durcansky Foreign Minister and despatched a telegram to the Führer of the Great German Reich praying him to become Protector of the new Independent State of Slovakia. Within twenty-four hours Hitler's reply came, formally taking over the problems of the State. German troops entered Bratislava on March 15th, while Hungary, officially recognizing the new State, invaded and forcibly seized Ruthenia, having received Ribbentrop's assurance of the full approval of Berlin.

Meanwhile, Goebbels excelled himself in publishing fantastic tales of an imaginary Czech terror in which oceans of German blood were being shed; purposeful propaganda which boded ill for the fate of the Central Government in Prague. Dr. Hacha hastened to Berlin, taking with him his Foreign Minister, Dr. Chvalkovsky, but already whilst they were on their journey, German troops crossed the frontier.

President Hacha seems to have been treated with even less consideration than was accorded Schuschnigg on a similar occasion a year earlier—if such a thing were possible. He went to Berlin on the 14th prepared to agree to almost any-

thing, including a Customs Union, anti-Semitism, a common foreign policy and the adoption of German currency. But capitulation resulting in the maintenance of Czechoslovak independence was no more wanted by Hitler and Ribbentrop now than it had been at Munich six months ago. He was met at once with the statement that there was no question of negotiations. A document containing the terms of Germany's requirements drawn up by Ribbentrop was ready for signature, not for consideration. Hitler signed it as a gesture ■ finality, and going out of the room, left Hacha and his companion to the mercies of Ribbentrop, Goering and Keppeler.

Dr. Hacha was an old man, yet his treatment at the hands of these gangsters was more brutal than Schuschnigg's had been. He was literally pursued round the table, threatened and intimidated into signing the document after hours of determined resistance. Thoughtfully, doctors had been provided and more than once their services were required to give him injections to restore him after fainting. It has even been said that one loophole of escape was left for him—a revolver placed within his reach. The Führer had informed him that Prague would be occupied at nine o'clock the next morning, Bohemia and Moravia incorporated within the Reich as a Protectorate, and whoever resisted would be "trodden underfoot." Now the three gangsters warned him that if he continued in his refusal to sign, half Prague would be in ruins from aerial bombardment within two hours.

At 4.30 a.m. Dr. Hacha's resistance was broken. He wrote his name on the document wherein the Czech Government placed the destinies of Bohemia and Moravia "with full confidence" in the hands of the Führer.

On the afternoon of the following day, March 15th, Hitler, Ribbentrop and Himmler entered the Imperial Castle in Prague and orders were given to hoist the swastika flag, symbol of the gain of yet another of the Führer's renounced territorial ambitions. At a great demonstration held in Nürnberg in the evening to celebrate the entry of German troops into Prague, Julius Streicher told his hearers that "this is only a beginning: far greater events will follow; the democracies can rise up and protest as much as they like, they will surrender in the end."<sup>1</sup>

It did not need Streicher to tell the world that the mask was off, or what Germany's indefensible action against an independent State might portend. The Western Powers had been taken by surprise, ■ is true, for the crisis had developed with

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 74.

such astounding rapidity between March 9th and 15th that it was all over almost before they became aware of the felony that Hitler and Ribbentrop were contemplating. The gangsters themselves may have foreseen the combination of favourable circumstances which made possible the sudden execution of the *coup*—the presence in Austria of numbers of German mechanized units for the celebration of the anniversary of the Anschluss, coincident with the turn for the worse which Dr. Hacha's repressive action against the Slovaks gave to the Czech-Slovak dispute, presenting Germany with a ready-made pretext for forcible intervention. The intention to violate the Munich agreements and to bring Czechoslovakia under their sway had been maturing in their minds for months and the whole reprehensible affair was a swift improvisation built on those partly fortuitous, partly contrived circumstances, and on the ever-readiness of Germany's vast military machine to take immediate advantage of any chance situation. Nevertheless, it needed this convincing display of international ruffianism to prove conclusively that Germany's policy was really not what the Führer and his Ministers professed it to be, before public opinion in France and Great Britain, as well as in those other countries where sanity and decency still prevailed, could be brought to understand Hitlerism in all its nakedness and utterly condemn the manifestation.

The most disquieting feature of the new situation for France and England was the sure knowledge that any idea of Germany being content with her gains and living in peace with her neighbours must now be abandoned. Not only did Munich envisage an international guarantee to Czechoslovakia and provide for consultations between the Powers should the minorities problems not be settled within a given time. Both the Chamberlain-Hitler declaration and the Franco-German accord of December 6th promised the settlement ■ differences with Germany by the method of consultation. But Germany had refused to give the guarantee and Ribbentrop raised quibbles over the request to consult, claiming Central Europe as a German preserve. It became manifest that the foundations of peace laid in the autumn of 1938 had been set in the sands ■ German honour, and after March 15th, the superstructure which Mr. Chamberlain hoped to erect thereon would assuredly never be added.

It was not only that Germany had abandoned the pretence that in the subjugation of weaker neighbours her only thought was to unite all those of German blood in one great German nation: an arguable though arbitrary conception. Her

foreign policy now could only be described as one ■ rank Imperialism, seeking expansion for the sake of power and dominion without being able to defend her aggression, and without the possibility of predicting a limit to her aims. Could anyone be so ingenuous as to believe that Hitler would now be satisfied, any more than after the Sudeten annexation? With Memel in his hands and even after the solution ■ the problems of Danzig and the Corridor—for both of which he lost no time in advancing his claims—would he not look still further afield? He had set in motion what, on an earlier occasion, he had called the rolling stone ■ fate; and for himself, as for the youth of Germany and the extremist group with which he had surrounded himself—Ribbentrop, Goebbels, Hess, Himmler, Streicher and Ley—the effect of his easy successes was to open up vistas of unlimited violence leading to yet more indefensible conquests.

Germany was stronger, too, with the loot of Czechoslovakia. The great Skoda factory, out of whose surplus Rumania and Jugoslavia were supplied with armaments, had fallen into her net, as well as fifty million dollars of the Czech gold reserve and large quantities of war material. Moravia and Bohemia were valuable acquisitions from the point of view of food supplies and would provide also a big reserve of much-needed labour for a country more than half of whose man-power was normally and continuously engaged in preparing for war. Still more important was the shortening of her strategical frontier, which became both easier to defend and more useful as a base for the next offensive thrust.

Britain, France and Russia made strong protests but had to accept the *fait accompli*. They could, however, intensify their rearmament and, with their eyes wide open, prepare for the certain clash of arms which would some day come. Memel was forcibly seized by the Germans on March 22nd, and in April ■ was announced that a measure of conscription would be introduced into the British Parliament.

Incidentally, the French protest brought to light a piece of chicanery on the part of von Ribbentrop. When the Franco-German Declaration was signed in Paris on December 6th, 1938, the French Foreign Minister emphasized the fact that it would in no way affect the Franco-Soviet and Franco-Polish Pacts, and pressed for the guarantee of Czechoslovakia promised at Munich. But when M. Coulondre presented the French note of protest to the State Secretary in Berlin, the latter quoted Ribbentrop as alleging that M. Bonnet had promised that Czechoslovakia would no longer be the subject of an exchange

■ views. This allegation was obviously a deliberate falsehood invented by Ribbentrop to excuse the action Germany had taken without prior consultation with France. In fact, the Munich Agreement and both the Peace declarations, far from being intended by the German negotiators for use towards the preservation of peace in Europe by consultation and the discussion of difficulties, were interpreted by them as giving Germany a free hand with Czechoslovakia and in Central Europe.

It was not at once apparent that Poland would necessarily be the next victim of Germany's greed for expansion. It might equally be Rumania, on whom Germany at this time made economic demands in such form as to amount almost to an ultimatum. What was apparent to all was that new methods were being adopted by Germany, who was in effect waging "wars without declarations of war; pressure exercised under threat of immediate employment of force; intervention in the internal struggles of other States." Lord Halifax pointed out that countries were "now faced with the encouragement of separation, not in the interest of separatist or minority elements, but in the Imperial interest of Germany." And Mr. Chamberlain asked whether this was "the end of an old adventure or the beginning of a new. Is this the last attack upon a small State or is it to be followed by others?"

Any doubts as to whether the evil forces which Hitler and his servile lieutenant had loosed upon Europe had expended themselves or gained in momentum with success, were soon set at rest. On April 28th Herr Hitler, speaking in the Reichstag, denounced the German-Polish Pact of 1934 and demanded the return of the city of Danzig to the Reich. Moreover, sure indication of the direction of Germany's next attack was given within a week of the entry into Prague by the presentation of a note on March 21st making extensive claims on Poland.

The British Government lost no time in making an effort to counter any action "which clearly threatened Polish independence, and which the Polish Government accordingly considered it vital to resist." On March 31st, it was announced that the French and British Governments had given Poland assurances of their support; and on April 6th an Anglo-Polish *communiqué* was issued making mutual the obligation to render assistance to each other against unprovoked aggression. This was followed by Hitler's speech in the Reichstag on April 28th, in which he not only declared that the German-Polish Pact no longer existed but also renounced the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935.

To the German note of March 21st, the Poles returned an emphatic refusal, which drew from von Ribbentrop the veiled and sinister menace that they "had better think things over." The Anglo-Polish *communiqué* of April 6th showed that they had taken his advice.

## CHAPTER XV

### DANZIG AND THE CORRIDOR

GERMANY'S grievance in respect of Danzig and the Corridor had provided one of the earliest claims for revision to find expression after the Peace Treaty was signed in 1919, and with Hitler's accession in 1933 it became clear that some day a solution of the problems these two danger spots presented would have to be sought.

Poland's natural alarm at seeing the fearsome apparition of the new violent Nazi Germany on her frontier led her to propose to France at one time a preventive war to crush the rising tide of militarism in Germany, and so to postpone the day of evil. A like offer by Russia to the Poles later was refused, and Hitler, aware of the obstacle that a Russo-Polish combination would place in his path, hastened to conclude with Marshal Pilsudski a Pact of non-aggression. This was signed on January 26th, 1934, and provided for direct settlement of all questions of whatever kind concerning the mutual relations of Germany and Poland. It was to be valid for ten years and affirmed that "in no circumstances will they proceed to the application of force for the purpose of reaching a decision."

That agreement was of very great value to Hitler for the next five years, but Pacts made in Germany have in practice a period of validity only co-extensive with the uses to which they can be put in the sole interests of the Reich: as a list of broken treaties, beginning with Versailles and Locarno and ending with the German-Czech Treaty of Arbitration and the Danish-German non-aggression Pact of May 1939, will conclusively prove.

Nevertheless, Hitler has since gone out of his way on many occasions to call attention to the great work of pacification which his negotiation of the German-Polish Agreement achieved, and to record his unbounded satisfaction at the improvement in German-Polish relations which it brought. "We recognize, with the understanding and the heartfelt friendship of true Nationalists, the Polish State as the home of a great, nationally conscious people," he announced in 1935.

The next year, although finding it "painful that the outlet to the sea of a people of thirty-five millions is situated on territory formerly belonging to the Reich," he recognized that "it is unreasonable and impossible to deny a State of such a size as this any outlet to the sea at all." In 1937 he was again taking great credit for the Agreement, "which has worked out to the advantage of both sides." And 1938 found him still sincerely gratified. "Since the League of Nations finally gave up its perpetual attempts to unsettle Danzig and appointed in the new commissioner a man of great personal attainments, this most dangerous spot from the point of view of European peace has entirely lost its menacing character." Hitler was even congratulating himself on the wisdom of the Agreement in January 1939, but on April 1st his tune changed, and in a bitter attack he warned England that she has "no business in the German *Lebensraum*" and stated that he would accept no orders in respect of the extension of German economic relations from any statesman inside or outside Europe.

Great Britain followed up the Anglo-Polish *communiqué* with assurances of a similar nature to Rumania and Greece and the opening of discussions with Soviet Russia. It was plain that she was determined henceforth to resist force by force. To this somewhat belated recognition of the need for sterner measures to put a brake on Germany's eastward drive, Hitler retorted by withdrawing from the Pact with Poland and denouncing the Naval Agreement. In his declared opinion, the British Government was pursuing a policy of encirclement of Germany which unilaterally deprived the Naval Agreement of its basis. It is true that they were trying to build around Germany a bloc of peacefully intentioned nations whose concern it would be to prevent aggression. But Hitler, whether by intuition or calculated pretence does not matter, affected to see a hidden menace to Germany in the new arrangements; and the fact that the next attempt on the life of an independent nation would be met by force could not be expected to find him meekly acquiescent if his intentions were really felonious. Therefore, he took up the false position that because Germany would not be permitted to commit, by threats, blackmail, or war, further outrages against the small states of Europe, Britain was seeking her hostile encirclement.

He had already made up his mind to proceed without delay to effect the union of Danzig with the Reich, and in Poland there were fears of a *putsch* timed to take place at the end of March. Polish troops, however, were gathered in readiness near the city and Hitler appears to have changed his

mind. Instead of having resort to a sudden brutal attack in force, he decided to employ the accustomed procedure of blackmail which had been so successful in other cases.

For some time, negotiations between Colonel Beck and von Ribbentrop had been in progress, and the latter said early in April that, although the Führer did not want war, the decision for war or peace rested with Poland. "On certain questions of vital interest to the Reich," he declared, "Poland must give way and accede to demands which we cannot renounce. If Poland refuses, it is upon her that the responsibility for a conflict will fall and not upon Germany."<sup>1</sup>

Ribbentrop's idea of direct settlement of questions between Germany and Poland without proceeding to the application of force was simply that if Poland did not give in and Germany went to war against her, it would be Poland's fault. Free negotiation as between two equal parties was not in his mind. And he believed that if the pressure on Poland were great enough, she would give way over Danzig in order to avoid the horrors of war. He seems to have acquired a habit of under-estimating the resistance that nations, both great and small, are prepared to offer when menaced by threats backed by the readiness of Germany to use her immense military superiority.

The demands he made on Poland in March were set forth publicly by Hitler in his Reichstag speech on April 28th. Danzig must return as a Free State into the framework of the German Reich; Germany must be given a route through the Corridor and a railway line at her own disposal, possessing the same extra-territorial status for Germany as the Corridor itself had for Poland. In return, Germany would promise to recognize Polish economic rights in Danzig and a free harbour; to regard the boundaries between Germany and Poland as ultimate; to conclude a pact of friendship of twenty-five years' duration, and to invite Poland to join in a condominium in respect of Slovakia.

Now, the reciprocal offers announced by Hitler, although in any case they would not have induced the Poles to make the sacrifices demanded of them, were only partly communicated by Ribbentrop to Beck on March 21st. In a speech in the Polish Parliament in reply to Hitler, Beck stated that neither the proposal in the guarantee of Slovakia, nor the offer of a twenty-five-year pact to Poland was made during his conversation with Ribbentrop. The first mention to be made of either of these was in Hitler's speech denouncing the German-Polish Pact. He declared that the rejection of the German

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 93.

proposals by the Poles was to be regarded as a refusal by them to negotiate, although not all the terms had been made known to them. It must be assumed, therefore, that either Ribbentrop deliberately suppressed two important conditions and so introduced a new variety of chicanery into his dealings ; or that Hitler spontaneously invented offers which seemed superficially ■ benefit to Poland so as to weaken the position of the Polish Government by making their attitude appear unreasonable. We are forced to the conclusion that neither of them ever had the slightest intention of guaranteeing the Polish frontier or of permitting those free negotiations to which they were bound by treaty. By omitting what seemed to be offers favourable to Poland, they made doubly sure of Poland's refusal.

Moreover, the benefits which the Poles could derive from Ribbentrop's offers were mainly ephemeral and would not counterbalance the renunciation of sovereignty which submission to the demands would involve. One of Hitler's fixed principles, adumbrated in *Mein Kampf*, is that a nation which has once submitted to humiliation will do so again ; and if Germany had secured, by means of a show of superior force, the return of Danzig to the Reich and extra-territorial rights through the Corridor to East Prussia, it would not be long before other demands would be made altogether incompatible with Poland's independence. But, assuming what we may be forgiven for describing as the temporary finality of the proposals Ribbentrop made, we may well ask what real benefit to Poland would ensue.

In the first place, Germany offered a twenty-five-years pact of non-aggression ; that is, an agreement similar to the 1934 agreement but of longer duration. The latter was to endure for a term of ten years, during which time neither party had any power to terminate it, whatever differences might arise between them. Yet Hitler and Ribbentrop ended it after only five years. What difference, then, other than a false sense ■ security, would it make to the Poles whether an agreement made with Germany were declared to be durable for twenty-five years or two years or a hundred ? None whatever, for Poland understood that the German Foreign Minister's signature on a pact which fettered the new dynamic Germany would be withdrawn unilaterally at any time in the interests of the aggrandisement of the Great German Reich. Ribbentrop was, perhaps, sufficiently conscious of this moral twist in Germany's make-up to believe it not even worth while to mention the offer to Beck.

Similarly with the suggested guarantee of the German-Polish frontier as ultimate, for surely Poland had every right to regard it as ultimate. In effect, what Ribbentrop proposed to Colonel Beck was : Germany wants you to grant her certain privileges, but does not expect you to make a sacrifice of your sovereign rights in the Corridor without giving you something in return. She therefore offers you something you already possess, namely, your frontier.

And again, in regard to Danzig, Hitler's generosity was equally insubstantial, for recognition of Poland's economic interests in the City and the promise of a free harbour made no tangible difference. What the proposal really amounted to was that, instead of Poland being the landlord and Germany the tenant, Hitler now proffered the suggestion that they should reverse the position : Germany would become the landlord and the interests of Poland in Danzig would only be maintained on sufferance of Germany.

That Danzig, apart from the Corridor, did in the nature of things present a problem of very great difficulty cannot be denied ; but also that vital Polish interests should be sacrificed because there existed a plague-spot of predominantly German population in the middle of an area inhabited almost exclusively by Poles, was a proposition that required something more than the mere assertion of German right and the clatter of a sword to give it superior validity. The German, however, seems always to labour in his foreign policy under the oppressive burden of what he calls the "German point of view" : a point of view which is expected to override the view taken by the protagonists of an opposing policy. In the memorandum drawn up by Ribbentrop and handed to the Polish Ambassador on the day of Hitler's speech, he wrote that nobody could deny that the German proposals constituted "the very minimum which must be demanded from the German point of view, which cannot be renounced."

It is indeed a regrettable fact that in any negotiations carried on with Germany, the other side is expected to arrive at its conclusions by peering at the problem through German spectacles ; that is to say, from the point of view of the interests of the Reich. Any other objective analysis leaves the negotiator open to a charge of lack of comprehension. So, in the same memorandum, we find it stated that "The Polish Government, however, gave a reply which, although couched in the form of counter-proposals, showed in its essence an entire lack of comprehension of the German point ■ view and was equivalent merely to a rejection of the German proposals."

Poland, however, had not "merely rejected" the German proposals ; she was perfectly willing to continue negotiations and to try to find a solution in respect of both Danzig and the Corridor which, though not conceding the annexation of Danzig or a German "corridor through the Corridor," would take fully into account the "German point of view."

Danzig would never have been a city of so much importance but for the industry of the Poles, Poland's overseas trade and its geographical situation at the mouth of her only great river. Its population is mainly German ; but the relative contributions made by the German merchants who developed the city on the structure of the overseas trade of Poland, and by the Poles themselves, whose industry and exports made its development possible, give Germany no greater right to it than Poland possesses. As the part cannot be greater than the whole, so the *entrepôt* cannot claim independence of the sources whence it derives. But, both in Danzig and in the Corridor, Polish interests inevitably clash with those of Germany ; and as Germany is by far the stronger nation, the existence of a Polish, as against a German, point of view is not to be admitted. The bone of contention between them was Wilson's "free and secure access to the sea" and to the port at the mouth of that life-giving access : an outlet recognized not long ago by Hitler as "impossible to deny." And over that bone the big German hound asserted rights to the exclusion of the small Polish terrier's point of view. Useless for the weaker contender to advance counter-proposals ensuring full respect of each for the rights of the other : in German eyes that was tantamount to a rejection of negotiations, and as such it was taken.

Colonel Beck's reply to Ribbentrop's demands ■ March 21st, although it contained a refusal to agree to a German annexation of Danzig and to give Germany a sovereign right of way in the form of a German motor road through the Corridor, did not shut the door to negotiation. Poland wished ardently to find a solution to these problems and had "for several years given the German Government to understand that frank conversations should be held" on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Germany invariably replied by asking the Poles not to expose Polish-German relations to difficulties by raising the question of Danzig. Not until after Munich and the disappearance of the Czech obstacle to German rapacity, when Hitler saw a wide prospect of expansion eastwards opening before his greedy eyes, did Ribbentrop suggest that those conversations should be opened.

<sup>1</sup> Speech by M. Beck on May 5, 1939: Government Blue Book, No. 15.

Under his guidance, the negotiations swiftly developed into a menace : a demand for purely unilateral concessions on the part of Poland. Germany's terms must be accepted as they stood, without discussion or modification. But if Ribbentrop, as one of the parties to the negotiations, might insist upon the acceptance of his demands in their entirety, and ■ the other party were not to be allowed to suggest possible alterations in them, why call the procedure negotiation at all ? What constitutes negotiation, anyway, but an effort to arrange a bargain by means of agreement ? Negotiation presupposes some measure of mutuality, perhaps a compromise ; and there is neither agreement nor mutuality where one side thrusts his claim upon the other without treating and without the possibility of another proposal being made for the reconciliation of interests which conflict.

This wholly arbitrary procedure, although it could not by any stretch of the imagination be termed negotiation, did undoubtedly represent the German point of view. If that must prevail — and Ribbentrop's position was that it must prevail in its entirety — then there could be no value at all in the German-Polish Agreement of 1934, which provided for "direct negotiation" in the first instance, failing the effectiveness of which, "they will in each particular case, on the basis of mutual agreement, seek a solution by other peaceful means. . . ." In any case, there was to be no recourse to force : a provision which surely should have excluded an attempt at blackmail.

It would have been bad enough if Ribbentrop had stopped there, but he went much further. In his conversation with Beck on March 21st, he laid particular emphasis on the necessity for "a rapid settlement, which was a condition of the Reich maintaining its proposals in force in their entirety."<sup>1</sup> Besides being ordered to concede the whole of Germany's demands, Poland must accept without delay if the pretence of negotiation were to be maintained, and if the reciprocal part of the proposals, so far as he had communicated them, were not to be withdrawn. What other interpretation could be placed upon this than that, if Beck tried to continue negotiating, Germany would proceed to take what she had asked for and more ? Knowing now Ribbentrop's methods and remembering the fate ■ Czechoslovakia, surely it meant also that by withdrawing her offer to recognize the existing German-Polish frontier, Germany would feel herself free to violate that frontier at the first favourable opportunity. It was as near

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 16.

the old cry, *Stand and deliver!* as it could well be, but now Ribbentrop wore the mask of a diplomat under arms, instead of that ■ the highwayman.

As Poland refused to be intimidated and as it became apparent to Hitler that, this time, force would be met by force, he had to find ■ way out of that awkward German-Polish Declaration which envisaged the friendly settlement by means of free negotiations of all contentious questions. However, the Third Reich has a short way with pacts and treaties: he simply repudiated it. But, to give a semblance of reason for denouncing it, he based Germany's withdrawal from it on the allegation that Poland, by entering into an agreement with Great Britain for mutual aid in case of aggression, had herself rendered it nugatory. The Polish Government, the German note maintained, "accepted with regard to another State [Great Britain] political obligations which are not compatible either with the spirit, the meaning, or the text of the German-Polish Declaration of January 26th, 1934. Thereby the Polish Government arbitrarily and unilaterally rendered this declaration null and void."<sup>1</sup>

The contention advanced by Ribbentrop in the German note was that, if Poland were obliged at any time to fulfil the reciprocal guarantee to Great Britain in a war in which that country became involved against Germany, Poland might be compelled to take up arms against Germany, too. An agreement which might place Poland in the field against the Reich, he argued, was incompatible with the German-Polish Declaration.

As that declaration dealt with a renunciation of the use of force for the settlement of disputes between themselves alone, it ■ difficult to find any justification whatever for such an argument. It amounted to a demand that Poland should renounce the right to conclude political agreements with other States, and, by implication, to a renunciation of her independence in foreign policy. Poland, in her reply, drew attention to the obligations which Germany had assumed towards Italy in their military alliance, and to the German-Slovak Agreement but recently concluded which, it is important to note, did not exclude the contingency of forcible action by Germany against Poland. There was, too, "the Franco-Polish Alliance, whose compatibility with the Declaration of 1934 has been recognized by the German Reich." Germany, in fact, raised objections to Poland undertaking obligations of a purely defensive character towards Great Britain and ignored the

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 14.

implications of her own obligations towards Italy and Slovakia. So what was right for Germany was wrong for Poland ; and although the latter might have a mutually defensive alliance with France, she must not conclude one with England. It was the German point of view again.

Before passing on to the events of the summer 1939, it is necessary to refer briefly to the nature of the counter-proposals made by Poland, for these, although they did not meet with the approval of Berlin, evinced a spirit of conciliation on the part of the Poles and a genuine wish to find a solution.

Before the proclamation of Polish independence in November 1918, a great part of Poland had been under German rule for more than a century, without the inhabitants having lost their national character and customs, or their language. At the end of the Great War, when the boundaries of the new State had to be settled, it was recognized that a corridor, as a means of that free and secure access to the sea which she had been promised, was essential for her economic existence. Whilst Hitler described a denial of access as both unreasonable and impossible, he has also said that he found it painful that the provision of it involved separation from East Prussia.

There could be but one means of securing the outlet which the size of Poland and the volume of her industry demanded, and that was by way of the River Vistula to the Baltic in territory in which the population was predominantly Polish. That territory is the province of Pomorze which contains, except in Danzig, a wholly negligible German element, so small in number as to give rise to no question of self-determination. But in Danzig itself, the part which lies at the mouth of the Vistula, there are 400,000 Germans isolated in Polish territory in the midst of a surrounding population of Poles.

The Peace Treaties, therefore, provided for special treatment of this German colony and assigned to it the status of a Free City, with its own Senate regulating its own affairs under a Commissioner appointed by the League of Nations. Certain necessary reservations of Polish rights in respect of the harbour of Danzig were made and its military defence was relegated to the Poles. It was not found possible then to devise any other way of dealing with Danzig whilst, at the same time, fulfilling the vital condition of access for Poland to the sea. But the agitation in Germany in respect of both Danzig and the Corridor flamed up immediately after the signing of the Treaty, and though intermittent, had always been maintained, pigeon-holed against the day when German strength would be able to assert its claims effectively.

Annexation of Danzig equally with interference with the Corridor, the Poles could not allow, as a material abdication of sovereignty over their own territory. If at the mouth of any of Britain's waterways, for instance, there existed a community of Germans, we could not entertain a proposal to grant them territorial status which would make their footing part of the Reich ; neither could Poland be expected to yield any part of her sovereign rights over Danzig. In the words of Mr. Chamberlain, "Another Power established in Danzig could, if it so desired, block Poland's access to the sea and so exert an economic and military stranglehold upon her." At the same time, it was recognized as a hardship, though not as an injustice, that Danzig should be *perforce* excluded from the Reich and East Prussia severed from it ; and there was made the best of a situation that did not admit of another solution. Fundamentally, Germany's claims were incompatible with the maintenance of Polish independence ; the populations outside and around Danzig and in the Corridor were almost wholly Polish, and of the two, the greater injustice would be inflicted on Poland if German claims were conceded than on Germany if Polish rights were maintained.

Still, the Polish Government were well aware that even the position ■ the favoured minority which constituted the Free State of Danzig might be capable of further improvement, and that German transit facilities across the Corridor to East Prussia could be simplified in Germany's favour. They had proposed, therefore, in reply to Ribbentrop's one-sided demands, a joint guarantee of the separate character of the Free City "based on complete freedom of the local population in internal affairs and on the assurance of respect for Polish rights and interests." They had also expressed their readiness "to examine together with the German Government any further simplifications for persons in transit as well as the technical facilitating of railway and motor transit between the German Reich and East Prussia. . . . The Polish Government emphasized that their intention was to secure the most liberal treatment possible of the German *desiderata* in this respect with the sole reservation that Poland could not give up her sovereignty over the belt of territory through which the transit routes would run."<sup>1</sup>

This ■ quoted here in order to show that the Poles, far from adopting an attitude of intransigence, were willing to go to the limit of concession, saving only their essential sovereignty. ■ Danzig were ever to become a German base, Poland would be

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 16.

as much under the sway of Germany as Czechoslovakia was after the transfer of the Sudetenland. Yet Germany professed to regard her own proposals as a "generosity unparalleled in history"; the Polish counter-proposals an obstinate refusal to appreciate the German point of view equivalent to rejection. Surely it ■ not a rejection to offer the next best thing and be willing to discuss it; and the Poles had offered a joint guarantee of the existence of the Free City and ■ German rights therein. Furthermore, Germany already enjoyed all railway facilities through the Corridor; German citizens were allowed to travel without customs or passport formalities to East Prussia, and Poland was willing to extend similar facilities to road traffic.

What it all amounted to was that Ribbentrop's efforts, after the entry into Prague, were directed towards subduing Polish resistance in order to draw or compel the Poles into the net of Hitler's ambitions. His eyes were on the Russian Ukraine and German colonization of the whole of Central Europe. But Poland refused her complicity and when pressure was brought to bear, the Western Powers commenced to erect a barrier against further uncontrolled German expansion in the East. Britain undertook specific commitments in Europe, guaranteeing Rumania and Greece against aggression, and entered into agreements for mutual defence with Poland and Turkey. She was engaged in negotiations with the Soviet Government designed to bring Russia into a scheme for the defence of States in Europe whose independence and neutrality might be threatened. "In the event of further aggression," the Foreign Secretary declared, "we are resolved to use at once the whole of our strength in fulfilment of our pledges to resist it."

Had Herr Hitler's intentions been pacific, there could be nothing in these arrangements to cause him anxiety. But they could not be expected to suit him if his aims were aggressive, and his renunciation of Germany's agreements with Poland and Britain, based on the conclusion of the Anglo-Polish Agreement, showed clearly that they were aggressive. Inasmuch as the new commitments in Europe were undertaken with the sole object of securing the independence of those small nations which had not yet been the victims ■ German aggression, they could only become operative ■ those nations were attacked. Nevertheless, Ribbentrop claimed that Britain, by organizing a re-grouping of the Powers, was attempting to coerce Germany and ■ isolate her by a policy of encirclement; and that in whatever part of Europe Germany might become involved in war, Great Britain must always take up an attitude

hostile to Germany, even in cases where English interests were not touched by such a conflict.

Foiled in his first attempt to daunt the Poles, he turned to the method of putting indirect pressure on them by stirring up trouble in Danzig so as to create a situation which would weaken Poland's hold on the Free City. A *Frei-corps* was organized, disputes between Polish Customs officials and officials of the Danzig administration were fomented and enlarged and, under cover of these disputes, arms were secretly brought into the City. By the end of June a *fait accompli* seemed to be impending. Defences were in preparation around Danzig, a pontoon bridge being built and a census of vehicles taken. Gauleiter Forster declared that "we are in the final throes of our fight for freedom. . . . To-day everyone knows that the Free State will soon come to an end and we also know how it will end." Meanwhile, the militarization of Danzig proceeded apace, a Polish Customs official was shot and the German Government notified the Polish Government that a German warship, the *Königsberg*, would visit Danzig on August 25th. This visit might well be taken as the signal for a conflagration.

On July 19th, Gauleiter Forster visited the League's Commissioner in Danzig with the object, apparently, of using him as an intermediary between the Danzigers and the Poles during the continued suspension of direct negotiations with Germany. Whilst he held out no prospect of diminution in the German claims, his attitude showed a possibility of a *détente*. He said that nothing would be done on the German side to provoke a conflict and that the question could wait, if necessary, until the next year or even longer. But the Gauleiter also made a statement which shows Ribbentrop in an unfavourable light.

"The Gauleiter said that Herr Hitler would have liked to take an opportunity to talk to the High Commissioner about the Danzig situation, but that Herr von Ribbentrop, who was present at the interview at Obersalzberg, had raised objections to which the Chancellor replied evasively: 'Well, it will be a little later, I will let you know.'"<sup>1</sup>

Here there was a chance to initiate new methods of conciliation which Ribbentrop deliberately attempted to sabotage. Even the Germans still maintained their claims in their entirety, the Commissioner, Herr Burckhardt, was a man of whose attainments Hitler had recently spoken with respect. If he and the head of the Reich had been permitted to get together in an exchange of views, there is no knowing whether great good might not have come of the meeting. But

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 37.

Ribbentrop, intent on another victory and convinced that Britain would not fight for Danzig, interfered and spoiled an opportunity where even the faintest chance ■ negotiation should have been welcomed and seized.

In the meantime, the British talks in Moscow were not proceeding satisfactorily. When agreement seemed to be near, always the Russians raised yet another difficulty which served to postpone the desired result. In diplomatic circles in France and Britain it was known quite early in the year that Ribbentrop was doing everything in his power to persuade Hitler to jettison those staunch, anti-Bolshevist principles about which he had shouted himself hoarse for so long. It might be difficult for him to reconcile the German people to the sudden abandonment of the whole basis of a policy which had been pursued with so much relentless vigour and vilification. But faced with the choice of a sacrifice of his visions of conquest owing to the new line-up of the Powers, or collusion with "those blood-stained murderers" of the Bolshevik Revolution, expediency showed him the way. "Any treaty links between Germany and present-day Bolshevik Russia would be without any value whatsoever," Hitler once declared, but the military leaders ■ Germany were, and had always been, in favour of a Russo-German military alliance.

Bolshevism had not always been the worst of Hitler's *bêtes-noires*, although he was consistent in his hatred of it. When he became Chancellor in 1933, he gave assurances to Soviet Russia of Germany's friendship and renewed the Berlin Treaty. In spite of the fulminations of the Nazis and the Bolshevik's political scorn of the "filthy Fascist sea," contact had for long been maintained between the stasis of the German and Russian Armies, and in the early days of the Nazi regime, the Soviet Deputy-Commissar for Defence and the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army had discussed the possibility of getting their respective Governments to agree to an understanding. Later, the political value of anti-Bolshevist propaganda led the Führer into a campaign against "the bearers of these poisonous bacilli," in which he posed as the saviour of Europe from an intolerable danger. The Russian reaction was equally violent and vituperative and, in 1937, the Deputy-Commissar, Tukhachevsky, and other generals ■ the Soviet Army were shot in a purge. Brauchitsch replaced von Fritsch in 1938 and the German Army thenceforth became immune from the contagion of Bolshevism.

It was a different matter at the beginning ■ 1939. If the British-Soviet talks ■ Moscow were to succeed, Hitler could

say farewell not only to Danzig and the Corridor, in which his prestige was now engaged, but to all eastward expansion for an indefinite time; and each facile success made yet another new conquest all the more necessary. He did not want war with Poland, backed, as she would be, by France and Great Britain, perhaps by Russia also. But if the Soviets could be inveigled into a *rapprochement* instead of joining with Germany's potential enemies, he might enforce Poland's submission without going to war at all. At least, so Ribbentrop advised him.

Certain it is that all through the fateful summer of 1939, Ribbentrop persistently maintained that England would never go to war over Danzig. Despite plain words from Lord Halifax and the assurances of the Prime Minister, Sir Neville Henderson found it necessary to warn the State Secretary, Baron von Weizsäcker, that "if Germany by unilateral action at Danzig in any form compelled the Poles to resist, Britain would at once come to their assistance. . . . If Hitler wanted war, it was quite simple. He had only to tell the Danzigers to proclaim the re-attachment of the Free City to Germany."<sup>1</sup> Dr. Keppler, Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs and in close touch with von Ribbentrop, had said that "Herr Hitler was convinced that England would never fight over Danzig," and it was Ribbentrop who had so convinced him.

Ribbentrop's firmly established, anti-Bolshevist convictions, so urgently emphasized during his stay in London, were even more easily discarded than the Führer's comparatively genuine antipathy. As an industrialist, he had been even more bitterly opposed to Communism than his master and had been attracted to the Nazi Movement in the first instance on account of its attitude towards that danger. Using, perhaps, language more delicately chosen than could be expected of the former Austrian house-painter, he had never varied in his condemnation of that pernicious doctrine. The proud architect of the anti-Comintern Pact, whose object was "to collaborate in the destruction of international Communism"; the man who had flown from London to sign the Treaty in Berlin as "the centralizer of the German effort against Communism"; who had done more than anyone else to bring Italy into the Triple Alliance against it and whose first words on reaching London as Ambassador of the Reich stressed the danger of this "most insidious of all diseases"—had only to turn his brown shirt inside out to find that, all along, it had been lined with the blood-red hue of the Soviets. The ex-champagne salesman, who had failed to sell

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 36.

his anti-Communism in England, succeeded now in selling Bolshevism to Hitler, who saw in it only "a bestial, mad doctrine which is a threat to us"; who affirmed: "I cannot make a pact with a regime whose first act is the liberation of the inmates of gaols. . . . In Bolshevik Russia there is devastation, grim murder and ruin."

In Germany in 1939, there was a wholesome respect for the might of the Soviet military machine. There had then been no war against Finland to expose the giant's feet of clay. Consequently, there would be no fear of a Russian understanding being other than welcome to the real source of Hitler's strength, the army. If Ribbentrop could bring it about, the benevolent neutrality of the Soviets, at the least, would induce Poland to submit to the German demands. And Ribbentrop's own view was that the mere threat of Russo-German collaboration would cause the Western Powers to fail in their undertakings in respect of Poland and Rumania.

There is good reason to think that Hitler hesitated to reach a decision which cut the ground from under the careful structure of anti-Bolshevism, upon which so much pain and fervid rhetoric had been expended. But the demon was at his side, urging him; and, moreover, the army would be pleased. The masses did not matter; they have never mattered to Hitler except as material, first for votes and then for total war. In the interest of the Great German Reich, he could reverse a policy or shed a few principles as easily as he could "withdraw" Germany's signature and violate a treaty. The problem was not so much the discarding, for a time, ■ a principle but of the price which he would have to pay to Russia; and whether Stalin could be tempted into a like betrayal of everything for which his particular brand of Communism ostensibly stood.

Those, however, who took the trouble to examine the character of the exponents of Bolshevism and Nazism and the fruits of their respective philosophies, found it increasingly difficult to discover much difference between the wearers of red and brown shirts. A Nazi, in short, as Ribbentrop's *volts-face* shows, turned out to be a Bolshevik with his shirt turned inside out, and *vice versa*. To use the jargon of dialectical materialism, it was a case of the interpenetration of opposites.

There were, of course, differences to begin with. But, as time went on, as the Nazis began more and more to lay their hands upon the profits of big business; as Stalin began to kill off the exponents of the true Bolshevik faith, the

differences became microscopic, the points of resemblance more pronounced. What were these resemblances?

Both began by the seizure of power by a group and the overthrow of a parliamentary regime by military force. Both liquidated their opponents by massacre. Stalin was undoubtedly the greater killer, and if Adolf has slain his thousands Josef has slain his tens of thousands—nay, millions. Did he not in 1932-33 deliberately starve to death several million *Kulaks* to break the peasant victims to agricultural collectivism? However, Hitler is fast reducing the deficit and doing his best now to catch up.

Both employed the same methods of doped education, a doped Press, suppression of freedom of thought and speech, attacks on religion, forced labour, mock elections, the teaching of children to spy upon and betray their parents, imprisonment without trial, robbery of the private citizen, public lying and the breaking of treaties. It is true that the Jews were better treated in Russia, but the difference was becoming superficial. The motive was the same—robbery. Jews are persecuted in Russia, not because they are Jews, but because they possess more and so are favourite victims of the infamous *Velutka* system of extortion and blackmail of their foreign relatives.

Although there was so much in common in the Bolshevik and Nazi systems, the spectacle of their rival ideologies in actual conflict in Spain from 1935 onwards, and the pretence of Russia, Germany and Italy that they were fighting for their respective creeds and not for any mere material ends, strengthened the beliefs of Communists and Fascists in other countries that these two political faiths were diametrically opposed. They took the protestations of the crusaders at their face value, whereas a study of Russo-German relations since the Treaty of Rapallo might have shaken a somewhat naive belief.

A good deal of the anti-Bolshevist and anti-Fascist propaganda on either side was designedly for internal consumption: to strengthen the hold of the respective dictators, Stalin being an even more absolute dictator than Hitler. Not that both were insincere in their hatred of each other's ideology, for both were sincere with the sincerity of a couple of man-eating tigers. The tigers might snarl at each other—as Hitler did when, in *Mein Kampf*, he called the Bolsheviks “parasites,” “vermin,” “blood-sucking spiders,” “street thieves.” But behind the ideological smoke-screen, the foreign policies of Russia and Germany were determined by iron necessity. Fear of the Western Powers threw them together in the Treaty of Rapallo;

economic considerations compelled them to do a large and increasing trade with each other. For Russia, the League of Nations was at first the tool of Capitalist Imperialism. Later when, under the influence of Rosenberg, Germany began to cast envious eyes upon the Ukraine, Russia came forward in the guise of an angel of peace and joined the League.

We have said that Hitler, despite the close approximation in many respects of the Soviet and Nazi regimes, hesitated to commit himself, finding it difficult to reconcile himself, for ideological reasons, to a re-orientation of foreign policy so radical as to link it with Bolshevism in a common pursuit. But by April 1939, it could not be said that he was wholly opposed to the idea, for it was noticeable that in his speeches at that time Russia was not even mentioned. The Führer is not the kind of man who, when it comes to putting into execution a long-cherished plan, will be swayed by any moral, legal, or ideological considerations. And unless he could beg or buy the consent of Russia to his Polish adventure, he was not prepared to risk the failure of an attempt to achieve the settlement he desired. He was still showing resistance to Ribbentrop's policy of co-operation with the Soviets as late as the middle of May. In a dispatch addressed to the French Foreign Minister, on May 22nd, M. Coulondre diagnosed the attitude of Ribbentrop towards both Poland and Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Ribbentrop, the French Ambassador was informed, considered it unbelievable that Poland should have rejected the Führer's proposals, which were Hitler's personal suggestions. He—Ribbentrop—would never have approved of them because, in his opinion, they were quite incomprehensible in "their clemency and their generosity." He was appalled at the modesty of Hitler's demands. He believed that Poland was soon bound to disappear in any case, partitioned once again between Germany and Russia. To him, a reconciliation between Berlin and Moscow was both indispensable for this purpose and inevitable in the long run. The deletion of Poland from the map would be in accordance with reality and tradition, and with the methods already employed in the case of Czechoslovakia.

"But, above all, ■ would give the rulers of the Reich the means ■ destroying the power of Great Britain. That was the chief objective which Herr von Ribbentrop had set himself, the *idée fixe*, which, with fanatical determination, he was increasingly striving to achieve.

"The hope, that a Russo-German co-operation would one

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 127.

day give the Reich a chance of striking a mortal blow at the world power of the British Empire, had been strengthened latterly in Herr von Ribbentrop's mind by the difficulties which were met with in the Anglo-Soviet negotiations. It was true that the Führer was still opposed to the political designs of the Minister for Foreign Affairs with regard to Soviet Russia. . . . However, Herr von Ribbentrop had his backers, notably amongst the Higher Command and the more important industrialists."<sup>1</sup>

So, the centralizer of the world effort against Communism, the architect of the anti-Comintern Pact, the sincere advocate of Anglo-German friendship, comes out in his true colours. The planks of the anti-Bolshevist platform had been rotten all through, the doctrine hollow and the crusade a mere pose. The friendship of the deluded partners of the Axis, built on that shaky platform, counted for nothing with Ribbentrop : they had served their purpose admirably. They need not be consulted yet, in case the Anglo-Russian talks succeeded. And, as he cynically threw overboard his principles and his friends, he also contemplated without a single qualm the dismemberment of Poland, one-half of which he would deliver up if he could to those same Bolshevik wolves whom he had never tired of holding up to execration.

All that was bad enough, but the treachery and the cynicism did not end there. The ultimate object, according to M. Coulondre, appeared to be "to make use of the material resources and man-power of the U.S.S.R. as a means to destroy the British Empire."

Mayfair could not be expected to know that the "lion" of only three or four years ago, the blue-eyed ambassador with the charming manners who executed so many amusing *faux pas* in London, would soon change to the blond beast of the Wilhelmstrasse. A man of many parts, he could deal in anti-Bolshevism and Bolshevikism almost in the same breath as easily as he had once sold the Henkell *sekt*, and then be ready to obliterate Poland and smash the British Empire.

The fate of the Danzigers and of the Corridor meant nothing all to him ; they were pieces in the game of world dominion —as Austria and Czechoslovakia had been, and as even the whole of Poland was now. He was moving the pieces so as to call checkmate to the king.

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 127.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE TRAVESTY OF NEGOTIATION AND RIBBENTROP'S SIXTEEN POINTS

FOR Ribbentrop to reach an understanding with Stalin was not all plain sailing by any means, for there were early indications that the Anglo-Russian conversations might have a favourable result. In May, the resignation of M. Litvinov, who was thought to be friendly towards Britain, encouraged him to make a tentative approach to the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin, who promptly journeyed to Moscow for a conference with Molotov, the new Foreign Minister. And with the entry of Ribbentrop into the market, Stalin found himself well placed for driving a hard bargain with England.

We know now that the bargain would have entailed the virtual issue of a licence by the British Government to the Soviets to plunder and rob, similar in many respects to that at which the less sensitive German political conscience found no difficulty in conniving. But in the summer of 1939 Ribbentrop still awaited, with what patience he could muster, the outcome of the British diplomatic efforts. There was then little hope that Poland would submit to blackmail and the indirect pressure that, in May, had produced a series of incidents in Poland of which Goebbels' propaganda made the fullest use. There might be, however, a lightning swoop on Danzig, and Ribbentrop was confident that Germany would be given a walk-over if it were carried out while the peace front was still incomplete.

Hitler himself had no illusions about French and British determination to stand by Poland, and would not commit himself one way or the other until the Russian attitude became clear. If Russia joined the Western Powers, he would have to climb down ; if the neutrality of the Soviets could be secured—at a price—he would take the risks that war with France and Britain would involve, even though General von Brauchitsch's prophecy of the probable result was not fully confident of certain success. Indeed, in June, when the "Condor Legion"

returned from the Spanish campaign—an occasion which, in the ordinary course, would have provided the Führer and his Propaganda Minister with an opportunity for hurling triumphant invective at the rulers in the Kremlin—Ribbentrop had to use persuasion to ensure that anything which might offend the Bolsheviks should be omitted from the speeches. In the result there were none of the old violent diatribes about Communism, but, instead, a denunciation by the Führer of the democracies, the encirclers and the war-mongers.

Equally, there was no abatement of the Customs dispute in Danzig, or of the irreconcilable demands on Poland. Recalling the words of Hitler, that "Danzig is a German city and wishes once more to be part of Germany," Dr. Goebbels said that the world should realize, from past experiences, that the Führer's words were not platonic, and that it would be a grave error to imagine "that Adolf Hitler withdraws before menaces or gives in to blackmail. Germany intends to take back all the territory which has belonged to her in the course of history." The German demands therefore had been greatly enlarged. There was now no question of only a motor road through the Corridor; Germany meant to take the Corridor and Polish Silesia as well as Danzig.

The plan, however, was to promote a fictitiously spontaneous movement in Danzig and the proclamation by the Danzigers themselves of reunion with the Reich. By sending arms and S.S. men disguised as tourists into the city, and by building up its defences, the Nazis hoped to place Danzig in a position strong enough to defy the Polish Government, which would be compelled to send troops to occupy the city by force in order to maintain the *status quo*. Rather naively, Ribbentrop thought that if this plan were successfully carried out, the Poles could then be branded as the aggressors, and Germany would be provided with an excuse for military action depriving the Poles of their title to call for Franco-British intervention under their non-aggression pacts. Both the British and the French Governments took steps to dispel Ribbentrop's illusions and to assert their determination to regard any forcible action undertaken within the Free City threatening Polish vital interests as automatically requiring the fulfilment of their obligations to Poland. The French Minister for Foreign Affairs sent a personal note to von Ribbentrop warning him that any action, whatever its form, which would tend to modify the *status quo* in Danzig and so provoke armed resistance by Poland, would bring the Franco-Polish agreement into play and oblige France to give in-

mediate assistance to Poland ; and the British Ambassador reinforced this warning.

Replying from his gift castle at Fuschl, whither he had gone to recuperate after an illness, Ribbentrop repeated his claim that Eastern Europe constituted a sphere of German interests, and asserted that France had taken advantage of the Führer's "generous proposal to Poland . . . in order to contract with that country fresh commitments strengthened and aimed at Germany." He refused to recognize the right of the French Government to exercise any influence upon questions involving the future settlement of "the destiny of the German City of Danzig." If France wanted war, he concluded, it would find Germany ready, but "it would then be the French Government alone which would have to bear before its people and before the world the responsibility for such a war."

Now, ■ the Danzigers proclaimed "spontaneously" the return of the city to the Reich, it would only be a move provoked by Berlin, and Ribbentrop intended that such a move must be resisted by the Poles. He proposed, too, that it should be followed by German armed intervention, which would automatically bring France and Britain to Poland's assistance. The charge of aggression, therefore, could only be preferred so that it might serve as a pretext for loosing upon Europe the war in which he, not the Führer, was seeking to engage Britain and Germany. The French Ambassador in Berlin reported at this time the views of a Nazi of high standing who was in Ribbentrop's confidence. He said that Hitler reproached von Ribbentrop "with having wilfully concealed from him several items of information proving the high war-potential of Great Britain. Moreover, he accuses his Minister of having committed him, in connection with Danzig, to a difficult undertaking which runs the risk of compromising Germany's prestige ■ a satisfactory solution is not soon found.

"It must be borne in mind," the report continued, "that the raising of the Danzig question is Herr von Ribbentrop's personal doing. However, when he undertook the campaign for restoring this territory to the Reich, he did not realize that he would meet with firm resistance on the part of the Western Powers."<sup>1</sup>

It was Ribbentrop's idea, then, to stir up all the trouble in Danzig, to initiate a dispute with Poland and, so as to persuade the Führer into taking greater risks than he would otherwise do, wilfully misrepresent the extent of British war preparations.

<sup>1</sup> French Yellow Book, No. 161.

Not only did he provide the pretext for the *casus belli*; he deceived Hitler into committing himself so far that his prestige would not allow him to draw back. How just, then, ■ the estimate of him which Sir Nevile Henderson formed, and of which he wrote in his book: "And at the end I realized that, as far as lay in his power, no one had done more than he did to precipitate the war. For that there ■ no hell in Dante's Inferno bad enough for Ribbentrop."<sup>1</sup> And Sir Nevile adds that "in his position as Foreign Minister, Ribbentrop had more constant access to, and, consequently, more chance of exercising his influence on, the Führer than any other German Minister."

The direct warnings given by Britain and France caused some reaction in the mind of the Führer and a slight lull in the tension, although troop movements continued and preparations for military manoeuvres were made on a vast scale ■ the neighbourhood of the frontier. Ribbentrop found himself in a delicate situation with Hitler personally—and his vanity and ambition led him always to place his own selfish interests first. He thought that, for a time, as little as possible should be said about Danzig, pending the more favourable circumstances that failure of the Anglo-Russian talks which, in July, were hanging fire, might bring. But Goebbels, between whom and Ribbentrop there was keen rivalry, published uncompromising statements about Danzig which were given prominence in the English Press.

Ribbentrop was extremely angry and insisted upon publication of an explanation pointing out that the Reich had never regarded the Free City as a problem to be settled by war. His attitude and that of Dr. Goebbels towards the Danzig question were more or less identical, both demanding the most radical solution. But each of them was anxious to be regarded by Hitler as the foremost champion of extreme action, and Goebbels was making use of the Press ■ influence foreign policy. This was an endeavour which irritated the Foreign Minister, who regarded it as a trespass on his preserve. Annoyed because his calculations about France and Britain were proving wrong, he looked upon the interference of the Minister of Propaganda as a challenge to his competence. Nevertheless, he was not only at variance with Goebbels: Goering and ■ were in opposing camps, too. The Field-Marshal held the view that Germany could realize no more of her ambitions without going to war, while Ribbentrop used all his influence with the Führer to persuade him that certain German

<sup>1</sup> *Failure of a Mission*, by Sir Nevile Henderson.

requirements, Danzig in particular, would be met without risking a conflict.

At the end of July there was noticeable a certain stiffening of the German attitude. Ribbentrop was still endeavouring to persuade the Führer that Great Britain would not fight but would agree to a solution similar to that of Munich so as ■ avoid war. But on July 28th, Hitler paid a surprise visit to Ribbentrop at the Wilhelmstrasse and arranged to carry out with him an inspection of the Siegfried Line—a sign that he still reposed unabated confidence in his Foreign Minister. By this time, the secret negotiations Stalin and Molotov were conducting with Ribbentrop behind the backs of the British negotiators had revealed to him some indications of the profound differences existing between Moscow and London, in spite of the impending dispatch of a British Military Mission to Russia. Throughout the Reich, reservists were being called up, restrictions were placed on the sale of food and other commodities, and anti-aircraft precautions were being developed ; while in Danzig the situation rapidly deteriorated. Ribbentrop constantly urged Hitler forward and Germany prepared, so that all would be ready when—as always happened—the propitious moment would come and, war or no war, the gamblers could make their throw.

Along with the intensification of German military activity, the tone of the Press became increasingly assertive of German rights in Poland, of alleged outrages committed by the Poles on the German minorities, and of the invincibility of the armies of the Reich. The German people would be restive if asked to die for Danzig ; they must be given stronger dope and a better reason than that to make them eager to follow the Führer into war. They had to be convinced that their very existence was threatened and that to defend themselves they must take up arms and make the great sacrifices a war would entail.

The Customs dispute between the Polish Government and the Danzig Senate came to a head on August 4th, when the latter threatened to remove the Polish inspectors at four Customs posts by force. The Polish Government at once lodged a firm protest with a time limit, to which the Senate gave way. Poland, apparently, had at last reached a stage at which a stand must be made against further Nazi attempts at encroachments on her rights, and the firmness of the protest seemed to take both the Free City and Berlin by surprise. There was, at any rate, no immediate violent outburst. By the 10th, however, the German Press recovered and launched

out into a campaign accusing the Poles of warlike provocation and demanding swift and thorough settlement of accounts with Poland. Utterly ridiculous as it must appear, German newspapers charged Poland with more than the intention to conquer Danzig and East Prussia ; they alleged a determination on the part of the Poles to destroy the Reich and exterminate the German people.

So menacing had the situation become that, on August 11th, Count Ciano visited Ribbentrop at Fuschl to try to induce him to agree to mediation in order to avert war. Signor Mussolini had involved Italy in a military alliance with Germany, but had no wish to become entangled in a general war whose object was to secure Danzig and other advantages solely for the Reich. The peremptory tone in the Polish note, however, with its time limit and threat of reprisals against the Free City, were enough for Ribbentrop to use as a base for rejecting the offer of mediation. Ciano left him in order to visit the Führer, with no better result ; but by recommending moderation and making clear the attitude of the Duce, he forestalled any claim by the Germans on Italy for immediate active co-operation.

The position at this stage bore a striking resemblance to the Czech crisis a year earlier. There, Nazi infiltration had found a tool in Henlein, whose role was now enacted by Gauleiter Forster in Danzig. A year earlier Nazi propaganda had been directed towards inflaming opinion in Germany and in neutral states into the belief that there was serious persecution of the Sudeten Germans ; that thousands of victims of Czech oppression were fleeing across the frontier into Germany and that the Government in Prague was powerless to preserve order and prevent bloodshed and tyranny. Now, the German Press proclaimed an even worse terror organized by the Poles, claimed that mass arrests were being made and that a phantom army of terror-stricken refugees was flocking into Germany.

On the evening of August 21st came the astonishing news that Germany and Russia had concluded a pact of non-aggression and that, on the next day, von Ribbentrop would fly to Moscow to sign it. Before this was made known, Sir Nevile Henderson, realizing that an effort at mediation was essential if war were to be avoided, had suggested to Lord Halifax that the Prime Minister should make a personal appeal to Hitler. He believed that military preparations for an attack on Poland would be completed within a few days at the most and had, in fact, been convinced for some months that the last week of August would see the peak of the crisis reached.

Accordingly, while Ribbentrop was in Moscow signing the nefarious pact which carved up Poland and gave Stalin a free hand with the Baltic States and *carte blanche* for a murderous attack on Finland, the British Ambassador handed to Hitler the Prime Minister's letter.

The main points ■ it were that H.M. Government were determined to fulfil their obligations to Poland; that they were ready to discuss problems affecting British and German relations; and that they would welcome direct discussions between Germany and Poland in regard to minorities. It was made clear beyond a possibility of dispute that the German-Soviet Agreement could make no difference to the assurances given by Britain to Poland and that, in the opinion of the Government, there was nothing in the questions at issue between Germany and Poland which could not be resolved without the use of force, if only a situation of confidence could be restored.

The choice therefore lay open to Hitler, on the one hand, of an amicable and favourable settlement of his Polish claims and the attainment of his frequently reiterated wish for a real friendship with Britain; on the other hand, if he persisted in provoking war, of finding Great Britain and France fighting against Germany to defend Poland.

His reply reaffirmed the German thesis that Eastern Europe is a sphere in which Germany must have a free hand. He asserted that the assurance given by England to Poland amounted to a blank cheque which had encouraged the Poles to let loose "a wave of appalling terrorism" against Germans living in Poland, and that Germany could not renounce its interest in the questions of Danzig and the Corridor. At a second interview at which Ribbentrop was present, after his return from Moscow, Hitler made a verbal declaration to the ambassador to the effect that he had always wanted an Anglo-German understanding and that, after the solution of the Polish problem, he was prepared to approach England with a large comprehensive offer, pledging himself personally for the continued existence of the British Empire if his colonial demands were fulfilled and his obligations towards Italy and Russia were not touched.<sup>1</sup>

It is as well ■ remember that, all through the Polish crisis, when Hitler or Ribbentrop speaks of a solution of the problem, they intend a German solution. Nothing less than the granting ■ their demands in their entirety and the complete submission of the Poles ■ ever in their one-sided minds. And the ambas-

sador was fully aware of this, as his answer showed ; although he appears to have maintained a discreet silence on the subject of the British Empire's existence being personally guaranteed by Adolf Hitler.

Sir Nevile insisted that his Government could not consider the Führer's offer unless it meant at the same time a peaceful settlement with Poland, and suggested that M. Beck and von Ribbentrop should meet and discuss between themselves how to save Europe from war. Both Hitler and Ribbentrop, however, were unresponsive to this latter suggestion, asserting, without justification, that on March 26th, M. Beck had flatly refused a similar invitation.

The German attitude, therefore, was that a "German settlement" of the Polish dispute must precede an Anglo-German agreement. Hitler, that is to say, required a free hand to do what he liked with the Poles and offered as bait a subsequent understanding with Great Britain. But somewhat similar large-scale offers had been made by him on many other occasions, only to be followed by a gradual process of dispersal and whittling-down. So the Government made it plain that not only was a peaceful settlement of German-Polish differences a preliminary requisite to an understanding with Britain, but that such a settlement must safeguard Poland's essential interests and must be secured by an international guarantee. They had obligations to Poland by which they were bound and which they intended to honour. They could not, for any advantage offered to Great Britain, acquiesce in a settlement which put in jeopardy the independence of a State to which they had given their guarantee. The next step, therefore, should be the initiation of direct discussions.

A further interview between the British Ambassador and Herr Hitler took place on the evening of August 28th, von Ribbentrop and Dr. Schmidt being present. The Führer now asserted that nothing else than the return of Danzig and the whole of the Corridor would satisfy him, together with a rectification in Silesia. Sir Nevile Henderson reminded him that in March he had offered to be content with a corridor over the Corridor, which, he pointed out, was inhabited almost entirely by Poles ; and begged him very earnestly ■ reflect before raising his price. Hitler, however, said his original offer had been contemptuously rejected and he would not make it again. Finally, Sir Nevile repeated to him what he regarded as the main note of the conversation, namely, that it lay with him as to whether he preferred a unilateral solution which would mean war, or British friendship. And in reply to

Ribbentrop's question whether he could guarantee that the Prime Minister could carry the country with him in a policy of friendship with Germany, he said there was no doubt of it if Germany co-operated.<sup>1</sup>

On the next day, August 29th, a further communication from the German Chancellor was handed to Sir Nevile Henderson in answer to Great Britain's proposal for the initiation of direct negotiations. It stated that, though sceptical as to the prospects of a successful outcome, the German Government were nevertheless prepared to accept the English proposal and to enter into direct discussions. They were desirous of giving the British Government and the British nation "a proof of the sincerity of Germany's intentions to enter into a lasting friendship with Great Britain." They declared that participation by their new ally, the U.S.S.R., must be a preliminary condition to the giving of any guarantees of a territorial rearrangement ■ Poland, and asserted that they had never had any intention of touching Poland's vital interests or questioning her independent existence. The note concluded as follows :

"The German Government, accordingly, in these circumstances agree to accept the British Government's offer of their good offices in securing the dispatch to Berlin of a Polish Emissary with full powers. They count on the arrival of this Emissary on Wednesday, August 30th, 1939."

It promised also that proposals for a solution acceptable to Germany would be drawn up and, if possible, placed at the disposal of the British Government before the arrival of the Polish negotiator.<sup>2</sup>

■ was, of course, highly unreasonable to expect a Polish representative to arrive in Berlin in less than twenty-four hours, and the ambassador took occasion to point this out, remarking that ■ sounded like an ultimatum. "After some heated remarks," both Hitler and Ribbentrop assured him that ■ was only intended to stress the urgency of the moment when two fully mobilized armies were standing face to face.

It was quite obvious, however, that the real reason for such excessive haste was a more sinister one. It was altogether contrary to the normal procedure to insist that a representative with full powers must go to Berlin to receive the German proposals. Diplomatic custom required that the Polish Ambassador should be invited to call on von Ribbentrop to receive the proposals for transmission to Warsaw and to make suggestions as to the conduct of the negotiations. The method prescribed by the Germans, however, precluded any possibility of the

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., No. 76.

German terms being placed before the Government in Warsaw for their consideration in time to instruct their representative as to the attitude he must adopt. Sir Howard Kennard, the British Ambassador in Warsaw, thought that it would be impossible to induce the Polish Government to send M. Beck, or any other representative, immediately to discuss a settlement on the basis proposed by Hitler. They would certainly sooner fight and perish rather than submit to such humiliations, especially after the examples of Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and Austria.

Was Beck to become another Schuschnigg, browbeaten, raved and thundered at by the neurotic megalomaniac of Berchtesgaden, bullied by Ribbentrop and threatened by Goering? Would doctors be in attendance again to ensure that the new dupe of Nazi negotiation by means of forceful persuasion should have enough strength left in him to sign a document surrendering his country's independence? There had been already too many examples of the Führer's insane rages and of von Ribbentrop's bad faith to allow yet another guileless victim to become a sacrifice on the infamous altar of Nazi diplomacy. Lord Halifax said that the British Government could not advise the Poles to comply with such utterly unreasonable procedure; and M. Beck told Sir Howard Kennard that he had "no intention of being another President Hacha." In the British White Paper Sir Nevile Henderson draws the inevitable conclusion that "the proposals in themselves were but dust to be thrown in the eyes of the world with a view to its deception and were never intended to be taken seriously by the German Government itself"—a conclusion which his subsequent interview with Ribbentrop must have amply confirmed.

Nevertheless, if arrangements could be made for the opening of discussions between Poland and Germany, there was even now a hope of peace. It would depend upon whether Ribbentrop would insist, in face of all reason and usage, upon a procedure which would prevent the parties coming together.

There was a more pressing reason for the German Government's urgency than the danger of the mobilization of the two armies. The military advisers held the opinion that the condition, vital to Germany, of a lightning war against Poland were to be fulfilled before the weather broke and held up operations, not a day must be lost. Success would depend upon the launching of the attack on September 1st at the latest.

On August 30th the British Ambassador received several communications from his Government in reply to the German

note. These contained proposals which, if Hitler and Ribbentrop had wanted a reasonable discussion, gave them every opportunity to preserve peace and achieve a settlement. They urged that no aggressive military operations should take place on either side during negotiations and expressed confidence in H.M. Government's ability to secure an undertaking in that sense from Poland ; they asked for co-operation to avoid frontier incidents, and suggested a temporary *modus vivendi* in Danzig. They pointed out the unreasonableness of the demand for a Polish Plenipotentiary to go to Berlin, and said that they could not advise the Poles to comply with such procedure. The German Government was reminded of their promise to communicate the detailed proposals to the British Government and a recommendation was made that the normal procedure of handing the proposals to the Polish Ambassador for transmission to Warsaw should be followed. Finally, if the proposals offered a reasonable basis, the British Government undertook to do their best in Warsaw to facilitate negotiations.<sup>1</sup>

It had been arranged that Sir Nevile Henderson should see Ribbentrop at 11.30 that evening to make these communications, but as the last of the dispatches received was in code a postponement of half an hour was necessary. The interview took place exactly at midnight, before which time the German Government had ostensibly counted on the arrival of a Polish Emissary with full powers ; and Sir Nevile Henderson records that when he returned to the Embassy, he felt that the last hope for peace had vanished. At that meeting Ribbentrop wilfully threw away the last chance of a peaceful solution, and no better description of what happened can be given than ■ the words of the Ambassador himself.<sup>2</sup>

"Herr Hitler's unamiable mood," he writes, "was reflected in Herr von Ribbentrop, whose reception of me that evening was, from the outset, one of intense hostility, which increased in violence as I made each communication in turn. He kept leaping from his chair in a state of great excitement and asking ■ I had anything more to say."

When Sir Nevile suggested to Ribbentrop that he should invite the Polish Ambassador to come and see him, the latter replied "in the most violent terms." Such a course would, he indignantly said, be utterly unthinkable and intolerable.

■ After I had finished making my various communications ■ him, he produced a lengthy document which he read out to me in German, or rather gabbled through to me as fast as he could, in a tone of the utmost annoyance. Of the sixteen

<sup>1</sup> British White Paper.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

articles in it I was able ■ gather the gist of six or seven, but it would have been quite impossible to guarantee even the exact accuracy of these without a careful study of the text itself. When he had finished, I accordingly asked him to let me see it. Herr von Ribbentrop refused categorically, threw the document with a contemptuous gesture on the table and said that it was now out of date, since no Polish Emissary had arrived at Berlin by midnight.

"I observed that in that case the sentence in the German note of August 29th to which I had drawn his and his Führer's attention on the preceding evening had, in fact, constituted an ultimatum in spite of their categorical denials. Herr von Ribbentrop's answer to that was that the idea ■ an ultimatum was a figment of my own imagination and creation."

Contrary to what was published in the German Press, not a single detail of the proposals was discussed with Ribbentrop, "who flatly declined to do so. While ■ ■ true that they were read to me, it was in such a manner as to make them practically unintelligible." Sir Nevile added that, for Hitler, the only alternative to brute force was that a Polish Plenipotentiary should come to him, after the manner of Schuschnigg or Hacha, and "sign on the dotted line ■ the greater glory of Adolf Hitler. And even that must happen at once." It is no wonder that he formed the opinion which he communicated to the Polish Ambassador that "he could not conceive of the success of any negotiations if they were conducted with Ribbentrop."

When the Ambassador observed that his Government had constantly warned the Poles to discourage all provocative action, "Herr von Ribbentrop replied that His Majesty's Government's advice had had cursed (*verflucht*) little effect. I mildly retorted that I was surprised to hear such language from a Minister for Foreign Affairs."

Another quotation from these illuminating dispatches completes the picture of Ribbentrop's official rudeness: "I must tell you that Herr von Ribbentrop's whole demeanour during an unpleasant interview was aping Hitler at his worst. He inveighed incidentally against Polish mobilization, but I retorted that ■ was hardly surprising since Germany had also mobilized, as Herr Hitler himself had admitted to me yesterday."<sup>1</sup>

Making every allowance for the excitability ■ Ribbentrop at such a critical moment, the damning fact remains that he knew that he was deliberately leading half Europe into war.

<sup>1</sup> Government Blue Book, No. 93.

What course could be more reasonable than to ask that the Poles should be allowed to see the terms which Germany was prepared to accept? What possible ground could there be for not fulfilling the promise to let the British Government know them, or to allow Sir Neville Henderson to read them, except that Ribbentrop did not want their acceptance? He refused every rational suggestion, rejected every advance towards providing a peaceful solution, and only went through the pretence of communicating the German proposals to the ambassador for the purpose of creating an impression at home and amongst neutrals that it was the Poles, and not the Germans, who would be responsible for the war that he was bent on procuring.

The same technique had been followed six months earlier when the Polish reply to the partially disclosed German proposals was declared to be a rejection of the method of negotiation. It had been used by Germany time after time during the last half-dozen years until a truly monstrous heap of hypocrisies and insincerities must have been accumulated in the archives of the German Foreign Office. Indeed, it is hard to find examples in which the recent foreign policy of Germany has been based on a true presentation of facts; while, on the contrary, distortion and dissimulation appear glaringly in almost every major issue that has arisen. Fabrication began with the lie that Germany was not defeated in the last war and the fable that she was stabbed in the back by the revolution. Then came the pose of rearmament "for peace," followed by the camouflage of oppressed minorities and self-determination to make a case for conquest; the complaint of encirclement made by a country which no one threatened; the bogus fears of attacks by weak neighbours, the demand for *lebensraum* by a nation which had to import labour. In every one of these cases there is bare-faced imposture which becomes bolder and less realistic as time goes on. And we see now how the same kind of threadbare fiction is employed in the guise of "protecting" the countries Germany invades and enslaves: Denmark, Norway, Holland and Belgium.

It is not that dissimulation has become more profound or the deceit more deceptive. The contrary is the case and the postures of Ribbentrop have become more unreal and unconvincing as the practice of unashamed lying has proved its temporary value. Under him it is the transparency of the deceptions that has increased so much. Like the Czechs, the Poles were to be branded as aggressors, although German troops invaded Poland without a declaration of war. England was

to be exhibited as their instigator, because she promised help if Poland were attacked. Compare the falseness of the wording of the document which President Hacha was coerced into signing, whereby he surrendered his country *with full confidence* to the Führer. Consider the preposterous claim that Germany invaded Denmark in order to protect her from a British occupation of which nobody ever dreamed. And in Norway, Ribbentrop asserts, German troops arrived just in time ■ save Scandinavia from falling into British hands.

Knowing how ludicrous those assertions are in face of facts, we may conjecture that the man who advances such propositions, believing not ■ them but that they will be believed, must himself be credulous and but poorly equipped mentally. In the case of the incomprehensible gabbling of the German terms in the presence of the British Ambassador, the crude refusal to allow him to read them or to let the Polish Government know their purport, surely no fair-minded person could be deluded by such amateurish play-acting. The science of propaganda, however, is not even now fully developed, and Ribbentrop has two audiences upon whom his clowning will produce its effect. They are the forcibly-fed masses in Germany itself and the similarly doped public of other totalitarian states, where dictators with identical instincts of aggression have developed a political credulity which, ■ real, would do but small credit to their intelligence. And it suffices for Hitler and Ribbentrop if, by lies and suppressions, a fog may be created in which the criminal may be given the benefit of a doubt in those quarters where truth is less esteemed than political advantage. Were it not that the German Foreign Minister, at that midnight interview, gambled away the lives and freedom of millions of human beings and set in motion forces of evil that neither he nor Hitler can control, his antics—leaping from his chair, reading through the proposals at top speed, “aping Hitler at his worst”—would appear as the broadest of low comedy.

So that we may understand the enormity and the cynicism and brutality of the methods employed by Ribbentrop and realize how thin were the pretexts and evasions by which the German Government and its Foreign Minister sought to shift from their own shoulders the terrible burden of responsibility for the war, a brief recapitulation of events during the last fateful hours may be given.

As a result of the Prime Minister's exchanges with the Führer, the British Government had secured the assent of the German Government, on August 29th, to participate in direct

discussions with Poland. The Germans, however, counted on the arrival in Berlin before midnight on the following day of a Polish Emissary with full powers to conclude, not to discuss, a settlement. The French and British Ambassadors in Warsaw saw the Polish Foreign Minister, and at noon on August 30th, M. Beck announced Poland's acceptance of the proposal to negotiate.

Sir Nevile Henderson had already informed Ribbentrop that his Government could not be expected to produce a Polish Emissary in Berlin within the prescribed time. At midnight, when he heard the Sixteen Points read out at full speed and asked for a copy of them, Ribbentrop said it was then too late as no Plenipotentiary had arrived.

At 2 p.m. on August 31st, M. Lipski, the Polish Ambassador in Berlin, asked for an interview with Ribbentrop to inform him of Polish acceptance of negotiations. At 3 p.m. the State Secretary enquired whether he came as Plenipotentiary or as Ambassador, for only ■■■ came with plenary powers would Germany refrain from war. Not until 7.30 p.m. was he received by the German Foreign Minister, who did not, however, even then inform him of the German proposals. When he tried to establish communication with Warsaw, he found that all communication between Germany and Poland had been cut.

At 9 p.m. the German radio broadcast the German proposals and falsely alleged that the British Government had been informed of them. It was added that the Poles had rejected them—another lie, since they did not know them. At 9.15 p.m. and 9.25 p.m. respectively, the British and French Ambassadors were summoned by Ribbentrop to receive copies of the plan for the first time.

There had never been a time, therefore, when Warsaw, or London, or Paris, had an opportunity to see or examine the proposals, which were communicated to them only after Ribbentrop had declared them null and void.

It scarcely seems necessary to emphasize the bogus nature of the German plan, or the full premeditation of Ribbentrop to render any possibility of discussions taking place out of the question. It ■ clear, too, that the Führer was in collusion with him and that it is not possible that Hitler imagined that Sir Nevile Henderson, at his interview with Ribbentrop on the night of August 29th, was given any opportunity of understanding what were the contents of the document which he was not permitted to read. Certain it is that Germany's acceptance of the British proposal was never intended to lead to the opening of discussions with Poland, and that Hitler had

already made his decision. Moreover, he was not to be deterred, once Russian complicity was assured, from enforcing satisfaction of his claims on Poland by the knowledge that France and Britain would regard the use of force against that country as an act of aggression calling for the fulfilment of their obligations. He had been led by Ribbentrop into taking up a position in the Polish dispute from which he could not retreat without a blow to his prestige, long before the Russo-German agreement was reached. He did not want to ally himself with the Bolsheviks, yet, having been led further than he intended, he was compelled either to retreat or conclude the alliance with the Soviets.

Still, after that was achieved, it is possible to believe that Hitler, who ardently wished to avoid war with England and France, may have believed it possible to secure his objectives in Poland without provoking a conflict. He was not so ardent for peace, however, as to be prepared to abate one jot of his demands ; only in the sense that if he could wreak his will on Poland and escape by some miracle the normal consequences, can it be said that he did not want war. He was ready to fight rather than forgo his claims.

Ribbentrop thought that he could achieve that miracle. This amateur, whom the Führer once declared to be greater than Bismarck, believed that in the Soviet-German Pact he would find the specific to frighten the British into dishonouring their pledges to Poland. He had been given every opportunity to understand the British character and temper, had lived in Canada, had travelled widely and had made many contacts in England before ever he came to London as ambassador ; yet he held to the opinion that the decadent British nation would never fight when confronted by that monument of opportunism, the infamous bargain with Moscow. Up to the last moment, until the British ultimatum came, Ribbentrop advised Hitler that he need fear no conflict with the Western Powers. If it were not so, what caused his violence and temper, his ill-manners and courtesy towards the British Ambassador on the occasion of his travesty of communicating the German proposals, other than that his calculations, once again, were proving wrong ?

The last decision was the Führer's to make, and it was by his orders alone that the die was cast and the fatal act of aggression perpetrated. But the war party of Ribbentrop, Goebbels and Himmler, Hess and Ley, when the war psychosis of the Führer flagged, provided the successive situations from which he could draw back only with loss of prestige, or im-

provised incidents and enlarged them into terrible accusations of Polish oppression and Macedonian atrocity to arouse again his smouldering passion of resentment.

In the middle of July, Hitler had become convinced that Germany would be involved in a general conflict if Ribbentrop's policy of pushing the matter of Danzig to extremes were followed. He was anxious then, without relinquishing his aims of course, to wait until more favourable circumstances presented themselves. At the beginning of August, the French Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin reported that the first phase had led to a set-back for von Ribbentrop, whom his opponents, and "especially Field-Marshal Goering," accused of having irresponsibly involved Germany in a most dangerous policy. But Ribbentrop had not given up hope of persuading the Führer that Britain would leave her ally in the lurch at the critical moment. On August 12th—the day after the British Military Mission arrived in Moscow—he was able to inform Count Ciano that he would go to Moscow on the 23rd to sign the non-aggression pact between the Reich and the Soviet Union. He expected the news of an understanding with Russia to shock the Western Powers into a betrayal of their pledges.

While the alliance with Bolshevism was still a secret from the world, he triumphed over the advocates of peace and convinced Hitler that a lightning war against Poland, in which the Polish Army would be crushed within a few weeks, would place him in the position of being able to confront the Western Powers with a *fait accompli*. At once a change became apparent in the German attitude. The scope of the Polish-German dispute was enlarged in the Nazi Press, and the province of Poznań and Upper Silesia were added to the German claims. From then onwards, the campaign against the Polish Customs officials in Danzig was resumed and free rein was given in the newspapers to tales of atrocity and murder. It was plain that the war-party of Ribbentrop had prevailed. He had scored an impious victory "by one of the most cynical acrobatic feats in political history," justifying the verdict, passed by Lord Halifax, that "on his shoulders, before the tribunal of history, will rest a heavy responsibility for this war."

On Wednesday, August 23rd, von Ribbentrop flew from Koenigsberg in East Prussia to Moscow. At the Russian airport there was the unaccustomed sight of swastika flags fluttering in the faint breeze. Hundreds of police lined the route to the Kremlin, where "blood-stained murderers still occupy high places." Remorselessly pledged to fight Bol-

shevism by every means in his power—a struggle in which “we shall be as firm as bronze”—the Nazi Foreign Minister entered a Government bullet-proof car for the five-mile drive to his destination.

He was hurried through the streets, closely guarded by members of the secret police, some of whom occupied another car which followed immediately behind. There was no reference to him in the Soviet Press, no cheering in the streets, no demonstration at the Kremlin. The absence of a popular ovation, however, would not be a new experience for the most unpopular man in the whole of Germany, for he had been uncomfortably aware of the stony silence of his own people at Munich a year earlier, when Chamberlain was enthusiastically greeted and even his rival, Neurath, cheered. It was significant, too, that the Italian Ambassador was not at the airport to welcome him, nor yet at the dinner at the German Embassy in the evening. Perhaps Signor Mussolini's representative remembered the words of Hitler: “Any treaty links between Germany and present-day Bolshevik Russia would be without any value whatsoever.”

For over three hours Ribbentrop discussed the terms of the pact with Molotov, the Soviet Premier and Foreign Commissar. Then it was signed and Ribbentrop, his pale eyes wreathed in a smile, shook hands with Stalin. He smiled because, although he was paying a terrible price, moral and material, his policy was about to enter on its triumph. Poland would be crushed and Germany would be a stage nearer to the military destruction of Great Britain: the latter an aim which he has since admitted in his preface to the German White Book.

Returning from Moscow the next day he was present at an interview between Sir Nevile Henderson and the Führer in Berlin, to hear the former declare firmly that the Russian Pact in no way altered the standpoint of the British Government, who would not go back on their word to Poland.

That declaration left Hitler with no illusions about Britain's determination. He knew then that he was about to commit an act of aggression against the State of Poland and that Germany would have to fight both France and Britain. Nevertheless, Ribbentrop, with his fatal inability to believe what he did not want to believe, remained stupidly unconvinced; and the tragic farce of pretending that Germany was willing to negotiate directly with Poland was carried through and the German Foreign Office prescribed a procedure which only a nation that had suffered defeat in the field could be expected to follow. The non-arrival of a Plenipotentiary was made the spurious

pretext for declaring that the Poles had rejected the plan and then, when at last von Ribbentrop consented to receive their ambassador and heard from him of their willingness to negotiate, the reply of the German Government was to send their troops over the Polish frontier and commence bombing open towns.

On that morning, September 1st, Herr Hitler issued a proclamation to the German Army asserting that Poland had refused the peaceful settlement he desired and had appealed to arms, leaving him no other choice than to meet force with force. Attempts ■ mediation by Signor Mussolini, President Roosevelt, the Pope, and the King of the Belgians, were all in vain. In Danzig Herr Forster announced the return of the Free City to the Great German Reich.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE SOVIET-GERMAN PACT AND ITS RESULTS

THE bargain Ribbentrop made with Stalin illustrates plainly the hypocrisy of his pretence of negotiation during the week following his return from Moscow. Moreover, it shows the danger to which the whole world is exposed when a man without either principle or honour is in charge of the foreign policy of a powerful militarist State such as Germany.

The text of the agreement was in general terms binding the parties to refrain from any act of force against each other, but it also provided for continuous consultation on questions touching their joint interests. The events of September partly disclosed what had been feared, namely, that Germany and Russia had agreed upon their respective spheres of interest in Europe and, further, to respect each other's pretensions to dominate and pillage in the Baltic and elsewhere.

Not everything that has since followed in Europe was planned then, but amongst other things it had been decided by August 23rd to partition Poland. The Russian invasion came quickly on the heels of the German. It follows that all the travesty of accepting the British proposal for direct discussions, all the comings and goings between the Embassy in Berlin and the Foreign Office, the formulation of a fictitious plan for a settlement, the perjured fable of its rejection, the unfounded accusation of Poland's alleged appeal to force; Hitler's ludicrous assertion in the Reichstag on September 1st that he had attempted to solve the problem of Danzig and the Corridor by proposing peaceful discussion, Ribbentrop's incoherent gabbling of the sixteen-point plan—all these things were sham and false, permeated through and through with deceit, double-dealing and faithlessness. The plot had been hatched not long after Munich and the play first took shape in March, when excessive demands were made. In May the action was determined upon and in August, in Moscow, the scenes were set by the producer. Then, with the whole of Europe for a stage, the curtain went up on September 1st on the first act of

a tragedy which has engulfed the Baltic States, Finland, Denmark, Norway, the Low Countries and France in enslavement or the catastrophe of war. These events, and the evils which are yet to come, derive directly from the pact with the Soviets and are chargeable against the account of Ribbentrop who negotiated it.

When Polish resistance has been crushed and the dictators have divided the spoils, the Führer proposes peace on the basis of the *fait accompli*, while the smoke of Goering's bombs still rises from the ruined towns of Poland. He has achieved his solution of the Polish problem ; he wants nothing more ; it is his final aim.

What infernal effrontery ! He offers peace with dishonour.

The dignified refusal of the Governments of Great Britain and France to allow themselves to be caught by a move so specious as not even to deceive the totalitarian neutrals, appears to have caused surprise in Germany. It caused anger, too, and heart-searching in the Wilhelmstrasse, where the rejection of the Führer's offer meant that another of Ribbentrop's carefully calculated plans had failed to mature. First, he said that Britain would never fight over Danzig. When that proved incorrect, he found new strength in the terrifying shadow of Stalin. Now surely, he told Hitler, both France and Britain will back out.

He was wrong again. He had taken Hitler up into a high mountain " and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time." All this power will be his, and the glory of them, the devil Ribbentrop promised—after a lightning war, when Poland is destroyed and the criminals in possession offer peace. At last the craven democracies must see the utter futility of prolonging a conflict the issue of which is already settled. But once more he was frustrated and his clumsy diplomacy failed.

It was, perhaps, only fair that it should be Ribbentrop who was selected, after the rejection of the premature peace plan, to proclaim Germany's determination to fight to the bitter end, for it was he who had so grievously misled the Führer into initiating a peace offensive. His speech in Danzig was broadcast throughout Germany and to the world in many tongues, and was saturated with his own personal hate and spite against England.

" Chamberlain has finally refused the hand of peace offered by Germany," he shouted. " Germany will not lay down her arms until she is assured that such an attack on the German people can never be repeated."

In 1935, he said, when France rejected Hitler's disarmament proposals—a plan which the French Government refused because Germany was arming in secret—it was England that had caused the sudden change in M. Daladier's attitude.

Then he had been sent by Hitler to arrange a final friendship with England. He had offered a defensive and offensive alliance in which he promised the use of the German Navy and German divisions for the defence of the British Empire. "I was given to understand that England attached no value to Germany's friendship."

During the whole speech he imitated the Führer closely, rising to paroxysms of indignation whenever he mentioned England, and raving hysterically in every reference to Mr. Chamberlain. It was an attempt, and a clumsy one, to detach France, but, as Pertinax wrote in *L'Ordre*, Ribbentrop seemed to take the French for idiots.

The French people, he went on, were cynically and brutally dragged into this war against their wishes by England and by a clique in Paris under British influence.

"And now for England—I have irrefutable proof that England had been secretly and relentlessly preparing this war against Germany for years. The English only came to Munich to postpone the war against Germany which they had already decided upon."

Surely Ribbentrop, when he made that fantastic statement, must have forgotten that he himself had convinced Hitler that the British would never fight!

After a repetition of the old falsehoods about India and Palestine, he turned on Mr. Chamberlain and asserted that the proof of Britain's stupidity lay in the fact that while the Prime Minister had signed a declaration at Munich that England and Germany would never go to war again, he had declared war on Germany in September. He accused Mr. Chamberlain of insolent vanity and abused him for answering Hitler's "generous and noble peace offer with coarse insults."

He spoke of "the old traditional relationship between Germany and Russia which brought much happiness in the past" and was now re-established. After congratulating himself on the success which had attended the negotiations, he laid great emphasis on the identity of German and Russian views on territorial matters: a fateful confirmation of the belief that the scope of the Pact was practically unlimited in its approval of aggression by the acrobats of Moscow and Berlin.

Whatever effect his frenzied diatribes may have had outside

Germany, the only result in Britain was to stiffen her determination. Chief interest in the speech, however, lay in the guarded references Ribbentrop made to the Soviet-German Pact and in his forecast that the strange new friendship would be intensified in the near future. Already Poland was under the iron heels of the Nazis and the Bolsheviks, and Russia had laid her heavy paw on her first victims in the Baltic. It was plain that at Moscow Ribbentrop had given away more than he would receive in his haste to secure the neutrality of the Soviets ; more than Field-Marshal Goering and the German naval and military chiefs were prepared to give without a promise of a military alliance. Goering, in fact, was hostile to the alliance with Russia.

In the Wilhelmstrasse it was known that Ribbentrop had involved Germany in a renunciation — her dream — Baltic supremacy and that Stalin had insisted upon being given a free hand to occupy strategic positions in Finland and the islands of the gulf, as well as in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. The Russian Dictator had no illusions about Hitler and Ribbentrop. He knew perfectly well that he could place no trust in their professions of a lasting truce between Germany and Russia. He knew that there was a tradition of friendship between Finland and Germany, and that Germany had helped Finland to maintain her independence in face of Bolshevik encroachments in 1918. What more likely, indeed, than that Germany, emerging successfully from the present war with Russian complaisance, should fall into disagreement with the Soviets and seek to regain what she was losing by the tremendous sacrifices Ribbentrop's policy of assuaging Russia inflicted upon her ? Just as a succession of acts of bad faith by Ribbentrop and Hitler caused the war with Britain and France, so those same breaches of faith must react upon Stalin and make him wary ; for the period of ten years for which the Soviet-German Pact was to endure would mean no more to Hitler than a similar validity had done in the German-Polish Agreement. And Leningrad was vulnerable to naval and aerial attack unless Russia secured a foothold in Finland and kept Germany out of it.

Hence Ribbentrop had been obliged to surrender Finland to Stalin—and a lot more that was then undisclosed. In his pressing anxiety to ensure Germany against the strangling effects of an Allied blockade and to safeguard her Eastern flank, he persuaded Hitler to agree to terms which the Western Powers, when confronted with them, had felt morally bound to refuse. It is probable that part of the arrangement was

vague and, perhaps, verbal, but to Goering and to the generals and admirals no agreement which sacrificed Rosenberg's eastern visions and secured Russia against Germany could be worth a merely benevolent neutrality of the Russian giant and the slender hope of adequate supplies to offset the effects of the blockade. Adventurers and opportunists as they all are, most of them would have considered a military alliance with the Soviets, for whose strength on land and in the air they entertained an exaggerated respect, as worth even the price paid by Ribbentrop. But they could not so regard a pact which gave Stalin everything he wanted and Germany too little.

Hitler and Ribbentrop had been weighing the advantages of a better understanding with Russia for some time before the march into Moravia and Bohemia caused the democracies to seek an arrangement with the Soviets to prevent further acts of aggression. So far as any of the Führer's other advisers were concerned, they were given to understand that what was in contemplation was merely a commercial treaty, for both Goering and Rosenberg were ardent advocates of the plan to seize the rich Ukraine and use Russia as a field for German colonization. The military advisers, however, entertained a wholesome fear of the Russian military machine and had no wish to repeat the mistake of 1914, when Germany had to fight a war on two fronts.

Nevertheless, although the Führer's judgments are above criticism in Germany, to ask the Nazis to change in a moment what had been for so long a time a fundamental doctrine of external policy was something that could not be lightly undertaken, and Hitler hesitated. Although it cannot be known what actually passed between the Führer and Ribbentrop at the many conferences *à deux* in the spring of 1939, there are certain indications which show that, at first, the former held out against a policy which could not be expected to command much enthusiasm amongst his Axis partners or of many in the inner circle of the Nazi Party. His anti-Bolshevism was genuine, and only for very material advantages could he be persuaded to change a tune that he really liked and substitute for a record that would certainly jar on Mussolini. Ribbentrop, however, entirely devoid of scruple, felt no such qualms as his master and sought strenuously to convince him that Russia's neutrality could be bought cheaply and that, with her surplus products available to fill the gaps in essential supplies of food and raw materials, Hitler could count on the faint-heartedness of the Western Powers for their cowardly acquiescence in his demands on Poland. He thought that the

military aid of the Soviets would not be needed, but if the democracies were so foolhardy as to support Poland, in spite of a German-Soviet trade agreement and a non-aggression pact, he was confident that he could secure it. He was satisfied that Stalin would be so glad to rid himself of the constant menace from Germany that he would readily enter a military alliance if that were the price of immunity. Moreover, when Germany had gained her ends, she could take back from Russia, by force if need be, what necessity now compelled her to give.

The dismissal of Litvinov and the appointment of Molotov as Foreign Commissar gave him his chance. In March he put out feelers in Moscow and thereafter frequent conversations took place between Molotov and the German Ambassador. The British guarantees to Poland and Rumania in May gave point to the arguments in favour of a comprehensive understanding with Russia and, moreover, rendered Stalin's acquiescence easier to attain, for he had claims on both those countries.

Bolshevist Russia is nobody's friend, and both Ribbentrop and Hitler believed that Stalin's self-interest would be no more likely to engage him in an idealistic alliance with England than in a *quid pro quo* arrangement with his near enemy, Germany. Nevertheless, there was much debris to be cleared away in the form of all the abuse and invective that had been hurled at the Kremlin, and Stalin held aloof awhile. Molotov was willing to conclude a trade agreement but would not talk politics.

In July, however, Germany took the initiative in proposing that the projected trade agreement, which would be of more benefit to her than to Russia, should be supplemented by a pact of non-aggression. Still the proposal made no appeal to Stalin. He wanted something tangible in return for helping Germany by supplying her with the sinews of war and, as well, remaining neutral while Hitler despoiled Poland. He was being asked, in effect, to connive at aggrandisement which would increase Germany's strength and place Hitler in a favourable position for a subsequent attack on Russia to attain ultimately at Russia's expense those very ends of which Hitler and his henchmen had made no secret for years. From the Russian standpoint it would be more advantageous to bring the negotiations with Britain to an issue and so keep Germany out of Poland and away from the Baltic, unless Germany could be made to acquiesce in placing him in a strong defensive position against Germany herself.

Just as Hitler formerly would have preferred an alliance with England rather than with Italy, so the Russian dictator felt less aversion to Great Britain as an ally than a country with widely advertised designs on the Russian Ukraine ; nor had he forgiven the iniquity of Brest Litovsk. It was of paramount interest to the Soviet Union to keep Germany out of the Baltic and to prevent German hegemony in the Balkans. Russia had lost territory in the Great War—the Polish Ukraine, Bukovina, Bessarabia, Finland and the Western Balkan States—and with two keen bidders in the market for his favour, Stalin found himself envitably placed to obtain from one or other of them that strategical position to security *vis-à-vis* Germany which the Great War had taken away.

As it became clearer to the opportunists of the Wilhelmstrasse that Britain and France were resolved to support Poland, German anxiety for the Russian agreement increased. So also did the Russian demands for a high price for co-operation, and Great Britain found herself faced with new obstacles as each difficulty was in turn surmounted. At length it was agreed that a British Military Mission should visit Moscow early in August. The announcement of the visit stimulated Ribbentrop's anxious bidding, and to Molotov's next enlargement of the Soviet's demands Britain and France could not agree. They could not in honour pay the price that Hitler and Ribbentrop were willing to pay.

By August 11th Germany and Russia had agreed on the partition of Poland, and Russia's products beyond her own needs were promised to Germany in addition to a pact of non-aggression. Stalin had succeeded in wringing terms from Ribbentrop which secured him in the Baltic against German cupidity. He had a free hand to compel Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to surrender to Russia strategical key positions which would ensure that no threat by sea to Leningrad can revive the German dream of despoiling Russia.

The Pact made no provision for Soviet military aid to Germany in a war against the Western Powers, for Stalin had no mind to risk the substantial gains that would accrue to him in the Baltic. Nor did he then give to Russia freedom to advance in South-East Europe : a licence which would have needed Mussolini's endorsement. But Article 3 provided that the parties should remain continuously in touch by way of consultation, and subsequent contacts have enlarged its scope. Throughout, Russia has considered only her own safety *vis-à-vis* Germany, and apart from the Balkan States, she has obtained the return of Bessarabia and a position on the Danube

within striking distance of the all-important oilfields. Each concession the Kremlin has wrung from Germany has been sought with but one end in view—the strengthening of her defensive positions against the time when a theoretically triumphant Germany will be ready to attack.

The paucity of the results from the trade agreement, the failure of the Führer's offer of peace in October and the valorous resistance of the Finns, brought Ribbentrop under the fire of severe criticism and placed him in a position of almost complete isolation amongst the Nazi leaders. The unpopularity born ■ his arrogance and conceit was intensified as disappointment with the Pact brought home to his confederates its many disadvantages. Actually, a more cunning negotiator in the person of Stalin had bested him over a bargain. He stands almost alone, surrounded by bitter enemies, his position maintained only by the personal friendship ■ the Führer and of that unpleasant character, Himmler, whose files give him no hold over the Foreign Minister because diplomatic privilege shields his correspondence from the prying eyes of the Gestapo.

Whilst Goering made great and ultimately successful efforts to persuade the Italians to take a more kindly view of the Pact, Ribbentrop sought to extract something more from a bargain which was turning out to be too much to Russia's advantage. Making urgent representations to Moscow, he gave out that Molotov, in a speech to celebrate the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, would make a most important pronouncement. It would mark the turning point of the war and might even afford an indication of armed assistance.

Molotov spoke, but far from fulfilling the hopes of Ribbentrop, he reaffirmed Russia's neutrality and made no mention of her friendship with Germany. Simultaneously, the Communist International issued a broadcast condemning Germany equally with England and France for conducting a war for world domination. Stalin, it seemed, had been too astute for Ribbentrop, who had miscalculated again. Von Schulenberg from Moscow and von Mackensen from Rome were hastily summoned to Berlin.

Germany, however, must be content with the neutrality ■ the Soviets, and whilst Stalin persisted in his claims on Finland, must look on as he squandered the resources the Nazis coveted. It was announced in Berlin that Goering would pay a visit to Rome, but the Italian Press denied the report and stated that he had not been invited. The time was not opportune for an effort to lessen the hostility of Signor Mussolini ■ the ideals of

Bolshevism: a snub which served to widen still further the breach between the rival camps of Ribbentrop and Goering.

Both Stalin and Ribbentrop had been guilty of a blunder in misjudging the temper of the Finns. That a small nation should reject the demands of a mighty Power forty times its size in population was a contingency neither of them had foreseen. They had thought that, like the Baltic States, Finland would succumb and surrender vital interests without a struggle. It was the essence of power politics as practised with unvarying success by Hitler, that the walls of the little States should crumble and fall at the first blast of the dictators' trumpets, and that the weaker nations should accept vassalage or extinction—slavery if they submitted, extermination if they should resist.

It was a bitter blow to von Ribbentrop when, on the last day of November, there came true what M. Molotov had just denounced as a "perfidious calumny," namely, the report that the Soviets were preparing to violate Finnish independence. Only Hitler and Ribbentrop were fully in the secret of the details of the Pact until after the bargain was made, Goering and the military chiefs not having been consulted. But once committed, Germany had no choice but to submit to the freedom for aggression conferred upon Russia. There were many Germans who had not forgotten the words of their Führer: "Germany is the next great objective of Bolshevism," and the parties to the anti-Comintern Pact were for a long time resentful. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that there should arise serious friction between Goering and Ribbentrop, and that the former should find strong support amongst those who had always viewed with mixed feelings the first advance of the Bolsheviks to Germany's borders on the common frontier in Poland. Goering does not easily forgive.

The Russian campaign in Finland had unexpected consequences for which Ribbentrop's opportunism had made no provision. The heroic resistance of the Finns disclosed weaknesses in the Soviet military machine and incompetence in high places which, together, cast a shadow over the legend of the Russian bully's invincibility. It was but a scarecrow of might to which Ribbentrop had hitched the Nazi chariot. For it, he had shocked the conscience of the civilized world and forfeited for Germany whatever of sympathy she was still able to command. Worse was to come, for the attempted Russian *Blitzkrieg* dragged itself out into something like a campaign on a major scale, involving provision for the very considerable Bolshevik army of food, equipment and supplies which Ribben-

trop's optimism had led him to think would flow in a wide stream into beleaguered Germany. Even allowing for the Finnish complication, anticipations of vast material benefits from the conclusion of the Pact had been greatly exaggerated. In fact, the Soviet-German Trade Agreement which preceded the Pact proved a partial failure owing to the Soviet's own needs and difficulties of transport. Many of the essentials Germany requires are produced at great distance from the German frontier and Russia's second Five Years Plan, whose time was but half run, had not succeeded in solving her own problem of internal transportation without her attempting to provide for a sudden expansion of exports to Germany.

There was, too, a serious reverse for von Ribbentrop in the field of diplomacy at this time. That star performer in treachery, von Papen, had for some time used all his tortuous and sinister skill to prevent the enlargement of the understanding between Great Britain and Turkey which would erect a barrier in South-Eastern Europe against Nazi aggression. Fortunately, the Turks were proof against his wiles and the Alliance with Turkey materialized, placing a formidable obstacle in the way of a German attempt to thrust out towards the oilfields of Iran and Iraq. Now, since Rumania has come under Nazi control, the importance of the alliance has become apparent.

For a time, Finland's great fight against overwhelming odds caused the Russians to retain for their own needs much of the supplies which might have gone to Germany; but however valiant the resistance of the Finns, the end could not be long postponed and the restriction was no more than temporary. The Pact had at least served one of its main purposes in relieving Germany of the need to fight in the East, and to that extent it was undoubtedly a diplomatic *coup* of the first magnitude. Between them, Stalin and Ribbentrop had hoodwinked the Allies and made the prospect of a successful war possible for Germany. However profoundly one may condemn the soullessness of the Pact and the naked imperialism it disclosed, it must be admitted that as a piece of realism it has seldom been surpassed in history. It was a stupendous achievement, and looked at only as the ready seizure of an apt expedient, it may be written down as the greatest success in diplomacy of modern times. All the more reason there is, therefore, to beware of Ribbentrop and to regard him always as one who is as capable of working still further incalculable mischief as are any of the modern dictators, be they Fascist, Nazi, or pseudo-Communist. His successes—and there have

been many—appear to shine more brilliantly on account of the paucity of practical results achieved by our own traditionally slower but higher principled diplomats. It should be remembered, however, in assessing our failures and their causes, that our dealings with other nations are immeasurably cleaner for their idealism and that we are willing to accept the handicap which honesty and morality impose. We prefer to observe our treaty obligations and not soil our hands with the blood of weak nations as the price of the help of a confederate. Germany, through Ribbentrop, acknowledges no such fetters ; *Right is what serves the German people*, and success is retrospective, cancelling the infamy of the means by which it is attained.

It can never be so with us. Ribbentrop is not more clever than our statesmen ; he has the supreme temporal advantage of being unprincipled. Against that we have a greater cause for confidence in the ultimate result because we believe, and act in accordance with our belief, that the forces of Right and Justice in the world are more powerful than Evil and will triumph in the end, however hard the fight.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE INVASION OF NORWAY AND THE LOW COUNTRIES; RIBBENTROP'S EXCUSES

THE winter of 1939-40 was a period of comparative military inactivity but one of intense political manœuvre by Hitler and Ribbentrop. In the field, Germany was confronted by the Maginot Line, with neutral States on her boundaries on the western shores of Europe. Each of these nations maintained a strict neutrality, failing in nothing which would avoid giving their powerful neighbour a *cassis belli* or even a thin pretext for violating their frontiers, and Germany appeared to have reached a position of stalemate from which she could only escape by attempting a frontal assault on the French defensive positions. On the other side, the French and the British, although facing another equally strong obstacle in the Siegfried Line, entertained a feeling of some confidence owing to their command of the seas and the pressure they could exercise through their blockade.

Hitler, however, had no mind to hurl his vast armies against a line which he might either fail to break or succeed in piercing only at tremendous cost, and the events of the spring and summer of 1940 afford melancholy evidence of the preparations he made during the long pause after Poland's defeat ■ circumvent the Allied plans.

First, he allowed Ribbentrop to make another bid for Russian military co-operation, and early in January it was given out that Molotov would visit Berlin. The announcement was premature and Ribbentrop waited in vain for the appearance of the Soviet Premier. Stalin, like Ribbentrop, was actuated solely by motives of self-interest and refused to countenance any proposal which would involve the Soviet in a joint war in German interests. Nevertheless, Article 3 of the Pact, providing for continuous consultation, was brought into play and Ribbentrop was able to reach agreement upon a further programme of mutual spoliation and aggression in return for a permit to Germany to invade Norway.

At what precise date Bessarabia and the Dobrudja were

promised ■ Russia or the absorption of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia agreed upon makes no difference to our condemnation of the traffic in the independence of those States. All that matters is that Stalin was promised complete liberty of action in the Baltic and satisfaction of his claims against Rumania. In return he would stand by while Denmark, Norway and the Low Countries were ravaged and enthralled by Germany. It was but another shady transaction as immoral as the conquest and partition of Poland ; a deal in which the parties agreed in advance to divide loot which they would help each other to plunder, and as such was a logical extension of the Pact. Having gained a better defensive frontier against Germany in Poland without having to fight for it, Stalin readily seized upon the chance of further strengthening Russia's position in the Baltic, again with a shrewd eye to aggression by Germany at a later date. For such prizes he could afford to let Germany have Norway so long as his nearer neighbour, Sweden, remained interposed ; and the integrity of Holland and Belgium was a matter of small concern to the Soviets. Ribbentrop's task had been rendered easier by Britain's known attitude towards Russia's assault on Finland.

The complicity of the Soviets having been purchased, a greater difficulty had now to be surmounted. Italy must be brought into line, first, to acquiesce in the projected German and Russian incursions into the Balkans and, secondly, to enter the conflict beside Germany. Ribbentrop was therefore dispatched to Rome posthaste to prepare the ground with Mussolini.

The time was propitious, for Italy was involved in a dispute with Britain over the stoppage of transport of German coal, and early in March he went to Rome for a series of interviews with Mussolini and Ciano. He was unfortunate in two respects, for an amicable arrangement of the Anglo-Italian differences was reached on the eve of his arrival and, apart from the difficulty of his mission to Mussolini, there was profound indignation in the Vatican at the atrocities committed by the Germans on Polish Catholics. Nevertheless, he succeeded in paving the way for a subsequent visit by the Führer in person at which general agreement was reached by the Axis partners, both as to the course Germany's campaign would take and Italy's consent to a Soviet advance in the Balkans. At the same historic meeting a provisional arrangement was made for Italian intervention in the war against Britain and France.

Once more Ribbentrop acted as broker, dealing in the rights of others, buying and selling *Lebensraum* and spheres of interest

which are the rightful heritages of other peoples. Throughout, it is his readiness to traffic in stolen goods which brings him success, not the skill of a diplomat. If he were hampered by principles of honesty and justice ; if he were not utterly devoid of scruple, he would cut but a poor figure in the Chancelleries of the world. Nevertheless, the universal censure of his actions leaves him unmoved and free to repeat his infamies, for success covers a multitude of iniquities and gains many adherents. To-day, Ribbentrop stands higher than ever before in the estimation of his Führer, who has heaped honours upon him and entrusts him with all the nefarious schemes a totalitarian state must carry through to maintain its crooked progress. He precedes Hitler always, clears his path and offers the bribe, corrupting wherever he goes. His moves, then, should give the alarm rather than the pomp of the Führer's arrival. 'Ware Ribbentrop, therefore, for if Hitler is prepared to set the world in flames—as he confessed to Dr. Rauschning—it will be Joachim von Ribbentrop who will lay the train.

Puissant as Mussolini is, his power is not so absolute in Italy as Hitler's rule in Germany, and there existed serious obstacles to a newly galvanized Axis. The murders of Catholic priests in Poland and the persecution of the spiritual subjects of the Vatican, many instances of which were well proven and authenticated, had outraged the Pope and offended a large section of public opinion. Ribbentrop had the unenviable task of soothing His Holiness and completing the appeasement of Mussolini, whose distaste for the Russian alliance was still strong.

His unpopularity amongst the Italians is as widespread as in his own country, and the crowd outside the station in Rome received him without a cheer. His reception at the Vatican, too, lacked cordiality and the bulletin which was issued later took care to point out that it was the visitor and not the Pope who had done most of the talking at the interview. He had many acts of Nazi brutality and oppression to explain, and it is not surprising that, in that presence, the usual lies and whitewash would not avail to soothe outraged Catholic feelings, which remained a powerful factor in Italy's neutrality.

Besides acquainting the Duce with the plan for the invasion of Norway—determined upon so long ago as January—the occasion was used to arrange for pressure to be brought to bear upon the Finns, to whom the mass of Italians were sympathetic, to reach a settlement with the Soviets so as to avert Allied intervention in Scandinavia before the Nazi scheme could mature. After the two interviews which took place, an

official statement was issued reaffirming Italy's neutrality, a pronouncement which was intended to obscure the true purport of the visit and provide a screen for the meeting between the two dictators which quickly followed.

Ribbentrop accompanied the Führer on his journey to the Brenner Pass where the Duce and Count Ciano awaited them in a bullet-proof car, the gift of Hitler to his fellow conspirator. Great as had been the progress the envoy had made, it needed the presence of Hitler himself to secure the renunciation by Mussolini of his position in the Balkans. But Ribbentrop had not gone to the earlier meeting empty-handed ; he had tempted Mussolini with visions of supremacy in the Mediterranean—the Italian Sea—and with a vast extension of his empire in Africa at the expense of Britain and France : Tunis, Egypt and the Suez Canal. Mussolini succumbed, but ■ was then agreed that Italy's entry into the war should be dependent upon the success of Germany's campaign and the defeat of France, the jackal slinking warily in the wake of the killer.

Little more than three weeks sufficed for Germany to put into execution the first part of the conspiracy, for on April 8th-9th Denmark was overrun and Norway invaded. In May of the previous year Ribbentrop had negotiated with the Danes a treaty of non-aggression, making use as ever of the expedient of a worthless signature to delude a free nation into a sense of security. Like men of straw distributing worthless cheques drawn on a non-existent bank account, Ribbentrop and Hitler were ever ready to give the most solemn assurances of Germany's intention to respect the rights and frontiers of her neighbours, even going out of their way to invite all and sundry to trust their word. Whether or not those guarantees, so freely given, were sanctified by being embodied in a treaty made not the least difference to them when advantage could be had by violating them, because they never intended to implement them. Not only Denmark, but Norway, Holland and Belgium all repeatedly received the same cynical assurances in one form or another, yet in the space of five weeks each learned the bitter lesson of Germany's bad faith, and until Britain frees them, all must remain starved and impotent under the iron heel of the oppressor. In Denmark's case, so hopeless would it have been to fabricate a shadow of justification for the wanton act that no attempt was made. ■ amounted to this, that Denmark stood in the path of the aggressor ; no other reason could there be and no excuse was offered.

As German troops marched into Denmark, German

transports were already nearing the harbours of Norway, Nazi agents were ready in the ports — silence the shore batteries and Nazi guides were waiting to lead the German advance guard to the aerodromes, railheads, and other vital strategic points. Norway was conquered by a series of amazing and hitherto unexampled treacheries, long prepared from without and within. Nazi propaganda and infiltration had ensured for the invaders the help of traitors like Quisling, whose name will rank forever with that of Judas Iscariot as a symbol of infamous betrayal. Pathways through Norway's mine defences were swept clear for the entrance of the German troopships, bogus orders were given to her naval commanders not to open fire and, bewildered and betrayed, in an incredibly short space of time the Norwegians found their harbours in German hands.

Norway had done nothing to invite or provoke invasion. So strictly did she observe neutrality towards the Allies that their interpretation of it might fairly have been regarded as being not impartial, but directed in reality against them and strained for the benefit of Germany. Yet these were the demands, formulated by Ribbentrop, which were insolently made in Oslo by the Germans :

Norway must not attempt to resist the German operations.

Every means for "securing" Norway must be put into German hands.

All communications, railways, telephones, etc., must be under German control ; Norwegian pilots must be available for use by Germany, Norwegian ships must not leave port.

Germany would take over the defence of Norway against England and France !

The German thesis was that Germany had entered Norway—without a declaration of war, of course—to protect her against an imaginary invasion by Britain and France, and on April 27th Ribbentrop called together the neutral diplomats and the representatives of the foreign Press to hear his perjured justification of the outrage against Norway. Never has there been a more shameless, brazen-faced imposture than the statement he then proceeded to lay before his incredulous hearers ; never on any stage has a play with a fantastic plot been received with so much scepticism and mockery. His address on this occasion does more to exhibit him in his true colours as one of the greatest liars of all time than anything except his later puerile inventions — whitewash Germany for her dastardly violation of the Dutch and Belgian frontiers.

The failure of the Allies in the West, he said, had led them to seek an extension of the conflict. The extent to which England and France had prepared for intervention in Finland by landing troops in Norway was shown by the discovery of a large number of documents which had fallen into German hands. A report from the French Naval Attaché in Oslo, dated February 8th, affirmed that landings in Norway were to be made under the pretext of bringing help to Finland. It was clear, therefore, he went on to say, that the Norwegian Government was ready not only to suffer such extension but to take an active part in it.

Espionage in Norway, he declared, was not only tolerated but was assisted by the Norwegian authorities. According to his argument, this was proof that they contemplated entering the war on the side of the Allies.

"A few days before April 8th, Germany learned of Britain's intention to violate Norwegian territorial waters, and to defeat it, Germany ordered her fleet to sail. The minelaying announced on April 8th was intended to cover the landing of the British Expeditionary Force, which was already at sea. The British troops were sent back on April 8th when the Admiralty learned that the German Fleet was in the North Sea.

"When the Allied statesmen realized the failure of their plans to invade Norway, they appeared with their customary pathos before the Republic and made the gravest complaints about the German move, asserting categorically that they themselves had never intended to do anything against Norway beyond laying mines. Mr. Chamberlain told the House of Commons 'the Allies had at no moment contemplated the occupation of Norway so long as that country was not attacked by Germany.' In the name of truth and justice," Ribbentrop exclaimed, "I will now hand you documents which prove that these assurances are lies and falsifications."<sup>1</sup>

Was ever such a farrago of nonsense and untruth uttered by a supposedly responsible statesman? It was described by the *New York Herald-Tribune* as "an insult to the world's intelligence," and an American broadcaster remarked that "the Germans are lucky; they find convenient documents wherever they go." Providentially, they found them in Poland and later in France, too. Even in Belgium during the last war they unearthed them!

The truth of the matter was, in fact, as Mr. Chamberlain had stated, that the Allies had no designs on Norway, whereas

<sup>1</sup> *The Times* newspaper, April 29th, 1940. German White Book.

Germany had and carried them out. The German plan had been in existence for over two years, and as long ago as January it was decided to put ■ into operation. Hitler waited only for a pretext and the completion of the necessary preparations ; for the consent of Russia, which Ribbentrop obtained, and for Mussolini's approval, which was given on March 18th at the meeting on the Brenner Pass. For many weeks, German troops had practised embarkations at German ports and Ribbentrop's agents had been busy undermining the Norwegian defences and subverting Fascist elements in Norway for the betrayal of the harbours.

The pretext was found in the laying of minefields by the British in Norwegian territorial waters to prevent the continued violation ■ Norwegian neutrality by German warships and cargo steamers : a violation against which Britain had made strong protests to the Norwegian Government without obtaining redress. Actually, Norway refused permission for the mines to be laid, and on April 8th, the Admiralty announced the placing of the minefields in spite of this refusal. The next day Denmark and Norway were invaded.

Ribbentrop now made this the transparently false excuse for Germany's action and informed the world that the invasion was a measure of retaliation for events which had taken place only two days before ! German warships were already on their way before the mines were laid, and so complete were the German preparations that it is utterly preposterous to assert that the execution of so vast a plan was not put into operation and prepared for over a long period of time. It would have taken place when it did if no mines had been laid.

Ribbentrop sought further to bolster up his case by alleging that Norway had advance knowledge of the British intention to lay mines inside their waters and had approved it. He even quoted a distorted version of the minutes of the Norwegian Cabinet Meeting of March 2nd. To this the Norwegian Government on April 29th replied with a declaration which described the allegation as entirely false. It stated that the minelaying came as a complete surprise and that an immediate protest followed. The Cabinet, in fact, ordered the Norwegian Navy to sweep the mines. Units of the German Fleet, M. Koht declared, set out long before minelaying took place, and Ribbentrop's use of the Cabinet Minutes of March 2nd was " the strangest distortion ■ facts imaginable. What the Cabinet then decided was to refuse to admit passage of Allied troops to Finland, which meant that Norway adhered to her neutrality."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, London, April 30th, 1940.

An even stranger invention was the assertion that British forces were already being transported through the North Sea and that part of their troop transports were attacked and destroyed by the German Air Force, the rest turning tail and fleeing to their home ports. As we know, none had set out. In truth, the force which had been collected to aid Finland had been dispersed a month earlier, permission for their passage through Norway having been refused by the Norwegians. That force had to be reassembled and the transports recalled, and a week elapsed before the first Allied soldier could be landed in Norway.

Less than five weeks later, Germany continued her ruthless campaign of violation and betrayal by invading, on May 10th, both Holland and Belgium. The Belgian and the Netherlands Governments had entertained the gravest apprehensions of the enormous troop concentrations on their frontiers, but Belgium had long ago withdrawn from her alliance with the Western Powers, preferring to rely upon the trumpery assurances of Germany's statesmen that they would respect the integrity of the Low Countries so long as they enforced the strictest neutrality. There exists not a whit of evidence that either country failed in any respect in their duties as neutrals.

Again, two innocent, unaggressive States were overwhelmed by the mechanized monster of Nazism aided by a Fifth Column which it had taken Ribbentrop years to prepare. The campaign we may leave to others ■ relate, confining the narrative to the wilful falsehoods unblushingly uttered by the Nazi Foreign Minister in defence of the outrage.

In order to cover each successive act of treachery and aggression by Germany, Ribbentrop has persistently advanced the theory that the aim of Britain and France since the commencement of the war has been to extend hostilities to those countries which Germany herself wishes to attack and subdue. Amongst his earlier fables was his assertion that Britain had long prepared for war with Germany whereas, as we know ■ our cost, we were hopelessly unprepared at and after Munich and did not begin hastily rearming in earnest until, in May 1939, Czechoslovakia was enslaved by Germany. Then, according to Ribbentrop, Germany invaded Denmark and Norway to forestall invasion by the Allies. So, tirelessly, he utters the same threadbare lies about Holland and Belgium.

The usual procedure followed. As the German armies swept forward into those unhappy countries he called together the representatives of the foreign Press and the diplomats to

hear again the old, old story. How hard ■ must have been for them to hide their smiles as he declared that "Great Britain and France have dropped the mask."

"After the failure of Norway"—the phantom Allied invasion which was beaten back by the German Air Force—"the alarm was given in the Mediterranean. This was intended to veil their true aim: an attack on the Ruhr district of Germany by way ■ Belgium and Holland.

"The Führer is not willing to expose the Ruhr to another Anglo-French aggression and decided to protect the neutrality ■ Belgium and Holland against the Anglo-French aggressors. . . .

"The German Army will now speak to Great Britain and France in the only language which their rulers seem to understand and settle with them once for all."<sup>1</sup>

He recalled the alleged attempt by the Allies to occupy Scandinavia, with the connivance of Norway, and said that when this had failed they had indicated, by transferring part ■ their fleets to the Mediterranean, that South-East Europe was to be the next point of attack. This was a ruse to deceive Germany, their real intention all the time being to invade the Ruhr through Holland and Belgium.

Germany had recognized and respected the integrity of those two countries, he continued, but only on condition that they enforced the strictest neutrality. This had not been the case. The Dutch and Belgian Press were hostile; high officials and the general staffs of both countries had assisted the British Secret Service in efforts to cause a revolution in Germany. Defence measures taken by them showed a clear departure from neutrality: they had fortified their Eastern frontiers and left the Western and Southern ones open. Furthermore, both had kept their forces mobilized on the German frontier, although no corresponding concentration of troops had taken place on the German side.

The chorus of derision which greeted these nonsensical perversions renders it almost unnecessary to refute Ribbentrop's absurd burlesque of the truth, and it would be a waste of time to take ■ as seriously intended to convince. Day by day throughout the winter, there appeared in the Press reports of large concentrations of German troops on the threatened frontiers. The feverish activity of the Germans, the scarce veiled menaces of their spokesmen and their known disregard for the rights of the small nations of Europe all pointed with increasing clearness to Holland and Belgium as the next near

victims of German greed and aggression. Except through their territories there was no way for Germany to come to grips with the Allies in the West unless she were prepared to batter her armies in costly profusion against the Maginot Line—and that ended where it touches the Franco-Belgian frontier. Yet Ribbentrop complained that because Belgium fortified her Eastern frontier against probable attack by Germany, she left the frontier against France open. To anyone except a Nazi, the meaning of mobilization by the two threatened nations and the fortifications on their Eastern frontiers without similar provision against France could only be that the sole threat came from Germany. And, as the invasion showed, the menace had been a real one. "Who, in fact, did invade them?" asked President Roosevelt's secretary by way of comment.

Ribbentrop, however, in putting forward his childish pretexts, followed the usual German custom of imputing to the victims or to the Allies the self-same intentions which Germany held. And so complete was the absence of evidence in support of his contentions that he was obliged to treat the strengthening of the Allied naval forces in the Mediterranean as a ruse covering a threat to attack the Ruhr through Holland and Belgium. In other words, the very absence of any indication of an Anglo-French move against them was, in Ribbentrop's view, merely a fictitious alibi. On a par with this reasoning was his pose that an alleged hostile Press may be adduced as a cause for waging undeclared war.

Holland and Belgium, as many have pointed out, fell through fear of the aggressor, aided by the treachery of the Fifth Column which Ribbentrop has done so much to foster by means of his fellowships and other underground activities. The opposition of the Dutch to the powerful invader did, indeed, come fully up to expectations, despite novel methods of warfare and the tragic inequality of the combatants. Nevertheless, their resistance was rapidly crushed, and likewise in Belgium, the first line of defence, which was thought would hold out for some considerable time, gave way before Allied help could become really effective. Here again, as in Holland and earlier in Norway, treachery intervened. Bridges scheduled for demolition remained intact, allowing German troops easy passage across the natural defences of the country; parachute troops were met and guided by Nazi sympathizers, sabotage by Nazi agents was widespread and, numerically in the air and on land, the Germans were immensely superior. Their mechanized units were not only more numerous, but

were infinitely more effective than the information in the possession of the French and British had led them to believe.

In short, the position of the British and Belgian forces in Flanders quickly gave rise to the gravest concern. Whilst General Weygand collected troops to cut across the bulge of the German line ■ make contact with the Anglo-Belgian armies, came the appalling news of King Leopold's capitulation, and from that moment the collapse of France became certain.

We know now that beneath the apparent united front against the ruthless enemy, the French people themselves had been largely pacifist and that amongst the politicians of all parties in France there were many who had worked not only for non-intervention and the dishonouring of the pledge to Poland, but who, even after the Government's unwilling declaration of war, intrigued for a separate peace with Germany: a situation which Hitler exploited during the long pause after the dismemberment of Poland to allow disaffection to ferment. Purposely he waited for disintegration to complete the elimination of France from the conflict, leaving the British Empire alone to be dealt with at his leisure.

Communism, too, had made great headway and many of the Communists throughout the country were in German pay, working treacherously for the surrender of their country. The collapse of Norway gave immeasurable strength to the defeatist elements and in June, in spite of the Anglo-French declaration whereby the two Governments undertook to make no separate peace, the reconstituted Government of Marshal Pétain capitulated and sought an armistice.

There is, necessarily as yet, a veil of secrecy over many of the events which led to the downfall of our great ally. On occasion it has been lifted a little, as when Mr. Churchill refuted the unworthy accusations of certain Frenchmen of the Left that Britain had pushed France into war in September and that the support we had given was less than the French were led to expect. Such matters may safely be left until a fuller revelation of the facts is made in due course.

At the Kroll Opera House in Berlin, the Führer delivered a speech in which he praised the soldiers and politicians who had helped him so far on the road to the complete domination of Europe. On Goering he conferred a high honour and then expressed his gratitude for von Ribbentrop's services in extravagant terms.

Disregarding for a moment, if we can, the vile expedients, the hateful opportunism, the hypocrisy and fraud whereby Ribbentrop secured his diplomatic results, the cold truth

remains that it is not by means of resounding victories in the field that Hitler is master of the continent of Europe to-day, although his campaigns in Poland, Norway, the Low Countries and France have been carried out with a swift, remorseless efficiency which compliments his mastery of strategy and the tactical skill of his army commanders. Denmark and Norway, Holland, Belgium, France, and now Rumania, have all come under the dominion of the Nazis by other methods than heroic combat. Before ever a shot has been exchanged their Governments have been undermined by the lying propaganda of Goebbels, the treachery of Nazi converts within the States, fear and the unprincipled diplomacy of Joachim von Ribbentrop.

The few remaining countries in Europe which yet lie in the path of the dictators—Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia—have long been subjected to the same unscrupulous diplomatic pressure and the same methods of propaganda and terrorism as practised on those which have already succumbed. Possibly Bulgaria is hardly in a position to resist, but of the others, Turkey, Greece and perhaps even Yugoslavia will withstand the aggressors, particularly if Russia—a certain future objective of a theoretically triumphant Axis—resolves the enigma of her attitude to Hitler's bid for world power by countenancing, or even helping, their opposition.

Upon the reaction of M. Stalin to the subjection of Rumania and the intimidation of Bulgaria and their bearing on the future of the U.S.S.R., and to Ribbentrop's last loudly-claimed success, the Axis Pact with Japan, may depend the immediate future of the Middle East; but even without a change in the attitude of the Soviets, Britain's and the Empire's steadfastness and the whole-hearted co-operation of the United States are enough to ensure a new order in Europe and East Asia far better than either Hitler or his sycophant have planned.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE THREE-POWER PACT : RIBBENTROP'S CULMINATING ERROR

WITH the overthrow of France, the German occupation of the Western coastline of Europe and the entry of Italy into the war, Hitler planned a great assault on Britain which should quickly bring her resistance to an end. Deprived of the co-operation of the powerful French Navy and of the resources and strategic value of the French Colonial possessions; without the stores and equipment left perforce in Flanders, the situation of the British Empire was indeed one of the utmost peril. Mussolini, hovering like a vulture, believed in a rapid German triumph and abandoned his hostile neutrality to become openly a belligerent and share in the spoils of victory.

Nevertheless, the miracle of the evacuation of the British forces from Dunkirk came to pass and the stupendous achievements of the R.A.F.—outnumbered but never outfought—the solidarity of the workers and the amazing fortitude of the population of Great Britain under the inspiration of Mr. Churchill's leadership, have combined to bring us to the sure hope of an ultimate victory more enduring than any the Nazis have yet won.

Hitler's plan was to strike first at the head and shoulders of the British Commonwealth with his powerful air force. He would destroy London and the industrial centres which were trebling their output of bombers and fighters and munitions for both adequate defence and an air offensive into the very heart of Germany. Our cities and towns would be razed to the ground, armament plants, aerodromes and harbours blasted out of existence, railways and bridges demolished, commerce and communications disorganized, the population terrorized and clamouring for surrender. When this purpose should be achieved, the way would be open for an invasion by sea, and the British Isles would be eliminated from the conflict. Having severed the head, Germany and Italy together would attack the limbs.

Many weeks have passed since the *Blitzkrieg* commenced. The *Luftwaffe* has come, but Britain still stands unshaken and undaunted, her people undismayed. The factories are turning out ever-increasing supplies ; our strength on land, ■ sea, and in the air is greater than ever before. Far from securing mastery, Goering's squadrons, despite their numerical superiority, are in process of surrendering to the R.A.F. the claim to command the air. The *Luftwaffe* has failed either to produce chaos in England, or to halt production of the essentials of war, and the blockade of Britain by submarines, by mines and by air attack on convoys and on ports cannot prevent vital supplies from reaching our shores. And the time is rapidly drawing near—if it has not come—when all the world will know what in their hearts the dictators know already : that Germany has lost the Battle of Britain.

Day after day and night after night, the invasion bases, the fleets of barges and transports and the embarkation ports from Norway to France have been subjected to intense bombardments by the R.A.F. In fact, not only has the execution of Hitler's plan to invade our island been indefinitely postponed, but Berlin and all the important industrial centres and military targets in Germany have repeatedly suffered destruction infinitely more severe than anything we have sustained. In spite of Goering's boastful assurances to the German people of their complete immunity from aerial attack, the Ruhr district is crippled for production and Berliners must spend their nights underground.

There was in Germany a considerable opposition, which included Goering and General Keitel, to the scheme of invasion and Hitler hesitated, as often he has done before. Once more Ribbentrop, backed by Goebbels and Bohle, was found amongst the extremists, urging the Führer to take the desperate course. There ■ nothing too hazardous, no expedient too vile, for Ribbentrop to recommend so long as he may wreak his vengeance on Britain. His incitements prevailed with Hitler. The experts were overruled and the Armada assembled, only to be shattered by the continuous poundings of the R.A.F. and the Fleet.

This spelt the second great failure in the German scheme. With Britain standing firm against the *Luftwaffe* and the opportunity for invasion fast receding, Hitler and Ribbentrop have had to seek some other means to accomplish her downfall. The successes of the R.A.F. in their offensive over Germany and in defence, and Britain's staunchness under the most intense aerial bombardment the world had yet seen soon

began to have effect on opinion in the United States and in other countries whose sympathies are with us in the fight against violence and aggression. Even in Russia a new respect for our air power is evident. New heart has been given to Turkey, Yugoslavia and Greece to show firmness in face of the increasing menace from German forces established in Rumania.

Rumania was an easy victim of Ribbentrop's diplomacy. She had seen Poland submerged without effective help from the Allies. When France fell, Ribbentrop began to exert great pressure on a country whose oil and wheat Germany so badly needed. She was surrounded by States which had revisionist claims upon her, and the Anglo-French guarantee was now of no avail unless Turkey opened the Dardanelles. She drew closer to Germany, making many concessions to appease the Nazis, but without gaining protection against Russia, Hungary and Bulgaria. In due course she was compelled under German pressure to admit their claims in Bessarabia, Southern Dobrudja and Transylvania. She might then have retained a precarious independence as a vassal of Germany, but the failure of the *Luftraffen* to clear the decks for the invasion of Britain brought home to Hitler and Ribbentrop the certainty of a long war and the need to revive in some form the *Drang nach Osten*. They needed Rumania's oil, and for any further advance through the Southern Baltic States towards the Mediterranean and the Middle East, they need a passage through Rumania. From the moment when Stalin and Ribbentrop made the German-Soviet Pact in August 1939, Rumania's fate was sealed, and in October German troops entered and assumed control.

There was a familiar ring about Ribbentrop's excuses for Germany's move: technicians were being sent, he explained, to supervise the modernization of Rumania's army for defence. When the "technicians" began to pour in by tens of thousands with all the equipment of a great army, again Germany—wolf-shepherd of many a sheepish victim—was extending her protection to the Rumanians against possible hostile action by Great Britain! So far, no documents have been "discovered" to incriminate Mr. Churchill, but surely by this time, when the wolf seizes the shorn lamb, the world might be spared the utterance of such cynical nonsense.

There had been a period of intense diplomatic activity on the part of Ribbentrop when it became clear that Britain was a much harder nut to crack than the dictators had bargained for. He had stirred up the mischief in the Balkans of which penetration into Rumania was only intended to be the first move. That

gave Germany the oil with which to aim further blows at Britain in the Mediterranean, Egypt, Africa and Asia.

Señor Serano Suner, brother-in-law of General Franco and Spanish Minister of the Interior, was called to Berlin, afterwards visiting Rome. Ribbentrop hoped that by offering Gibraltar and French Morocco to Spain, General Franco might be persuaded to join the Axis in the war against Britain. The bait was tempting and, as usual, would cost Germany nothing. For several weeks Ribbentrop and Ciano pressed Suner to agree to permit German troops a passage through Spain and to engage the Spanish Army with them in an attack on Gibraltar.

The Suez Canal ■ the other end Mussolini would look after by throwing the strength of Italy against Egypt. Thus it was hoped to seal the Mediterranean at both ends and confine the British Fleet. Meanwhile, in the Balkans, the new tripartite pact would act as a deterrent to the Soviets from giving support to Turkey and Greece. Caught in a pincer-grip between the Italian Army massed in Albania and the German forces in Rumania, they would be forced into surrender, and Istanbul, as well as Gibraltar and the Canal, would be in German control through the Axis.

Ribbentrop's intrigues had hitherto been so uniformly successful that it was a shock to find that in not one of the three separate parts of the whole plan was he to have it all his own way. General Franco is not yet prepared to discard his neutral pose at the bidding of the Axis, and if German troops cross into Spain, they will do so without the consent of the Spaniards. In Libya, the Italians have sustained almost unparalleled reverses. In the Balkans, Greece and Turkey present a bold front, and Soviet Russia and Turkey have re-established their former friendly relations.

Before the subjection of Rumania, however, two events of differing degrees of importance occurred: the conclusion in Berlin of the tripartite alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan, and the subsequent meeting of Hitler and Mussolini on the Brenner Pass. Both gave rise ■ much speculation, and each may well have a profound effect on the future course of the war.

The Axis Military Pact with Japan appears from its text ■ be aimed first at the United States of America; secondly, but less frankly, ■ Russia—and, of course, openly through both of them, at the British Empire. With the American aspect of ■ we deal first, before turning to the probable reactions of M. Stalin.

If its object was primarily intimidation, the dictators must be singularly disappointed with its reception on the other side of the Atlantic. There is no doubt that the splendid help America was and is still giving to Britain, and her recent defence agreement with Canada, have caused acute concern to the Axis, and it was hoped that the pact would frighten the Americans into denying war supplies to Britain and deter them from drifting into war by her side. The result was markedly in the opposite direction. The United States, which has a wholesome distaste for the ways of the dictators and which has suffered many pin-pricks from the Japanese during recent months, is not a nation to be easily deterred by threats from pursuing a considered policy. It is an intensely virile nation with unlimited resources, as yet only at the beginning of its development as one of the greatest of the World Powers. The report of Ribbentrop's address, made after the signature of the pact, therefore gave rise only to feelings of scorn and a determination to intensify her efforts to help Britain.

On the morning of September 27th there was a great gathering of journalists and the entire diplomatic corps in the Reichs Chancellery in Berlin called to view the ceremony of the signing of the pact and to hear the speeches of the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy and of the Japanese Ambassador. Ribbentrop sat in the place of honour at a long table, with Ciano on one side and Kurusu on the other. The signature of the pact was followed by the spectacular entry of the Führer. To him Ribbentrop reported its conclusion and proceeded to deliver an address in which the usual references were made to the "Jewish capitalist democracies who had hurled Europe into a war Germany did not want." He declared that the pact did not alter Germany's relation with Russia and then proceeded to utter a warning which could refer to none except the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

"The Pact is a military alliance between the three mightiest States of the world," he announced. ". . . Any State which may be intending to interfere in the final phase of the solution of these problems in Europe or Eastern Asia and to attack one of the parties of the three-Power pact, will have to deal with the entire concentrated force of the three nations, comprising over two hundred and fifty million souls."

Reading these brave words, the people of the United States refused to shudder. Mr. Cordell Hull defined the pact as a menace directed against the United States; Mr. Sumner Wells emphasized America's determination to render all "material

support and assistance." In truth, Ribbentrop's diplomacy had the immediate effect of strengthening America's determination not only to increase that support, but to co-operate actively with the British Empire in world affairs. "Americans," declared President Roosevelt, "will not be scared or threatened into the ways the dictators want us to follow. . . . No combination of dictator countries of Europe and Asia will stop the help we are giving. . . ."

Japan's Foreign Minister had been indiscreet during an interview after the conclusion of the pact in which his words gave point to the attempted intimidation of America. At once Colonel Knox, U.S. Secretary of the Navy, took up the challenge, and instead of America being frightened ■ was the Japanese who were now scared. The Foreign Minister hurriedly explained that his words were intended to mean something quite different from that which their sense conveyed ; his bluff had been called.

An immediate result of the pact, and one which was cordially welcomed in the United States, was announced by Mr. Churchill. The Burma Road, which had been closed to the transport of war materials to China, would be reopened on October 18th. It would seem, therefore, that Japan, which stood to gain almost nothing from the alliance so far as anyone could see, had lost heavily on balance by linking up with the Axis Powers. United States naval reserves were recalled, defence measures speeded up and, in China, the power to transport necessary supplies ■ resist the Japanese became assured. Against the increased vigilance of America, the intensification of the economic restrictions she had imposed on Japan and the prospect of an even greater expansion of armament supplies to both Britain and China, there is little advantage to accrue to Japan beyond the empty satisfaction she may derive from the wording of the second undertaking set forth in the text of the agreement. Therein, "Germany and Italy recognize and respect the leadership of Japan in the establishment of a new order in East Asia."

To that arrogant claim, both the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. will have something to say, and whatever inroads Japan may make into British interests in the East, an account will be rendered when the war is ended and reinstatement enforced. Moreover, any attempt by Japan to seize the Dutch East Indies will now be met by swift action on the part of America. So far as the Pacific is concerned, the pact has reawakened American opinion to the danger of a policy of appeasement. Japan has invited and ensured the certain bitter hostility of the

United States to any further aggressive action, and for consolation can but contemplate the fragile splendour of leadership of a new order conferred by those have still to win the right to its bestowal. She can expect no help from the Axis in the East, but is committed to engage in war against the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R. should either of those powerful nations go to war against Germany and Italy during the present struggle. And the pact has brought home to the Americans the realization that Britain alone stands between them and Germany.

The pact provides a complementary assurance to Germany and Italy that Japan will recognize and respect their leadership in the establishment of a new order in Europe. Without that assurance, however, the Axis Powers had already arrogated to themselves the right to create that new order; now they seek to insure it. Its permanence will naturally depend upon the outcome of the war; and the high-sounding phrases of the undertakings can have no more force or meaning than ultimate success in arms can give them.

Nevertheless, difficult as it is to perceive what advantage there may be for Japan in the pact except increased prestige, she was not inveigled into entering into it without Hitler and Mussolini envisaging for their own cause some immediate profit. They hoped by means of it to engage America in the East so that, whether she maintained her neutrality or eventually cast in her lot with the British Commonwealth, the energies of her armament industries would be diverted from helping Britain to making provision for her own defensive needs. The opposite effect having been produced, it may be assumed that Ribbentrop expected other benefits from the negotiation of the pact.

There were, in truth, certain reasons present in the minds of the dictators other than the clumsy attempt to change the direction of American policy with the bogey of "the concentrated force of three nations comprising over two hundred and fifty million souls." It could have no terrors for Turkey, Yugoslavia, Greece, or Egypt, for Japan could not reach them. This leaves Russia as the nation warned by the conclusion of a pact which included her competitor and traditional enemy in the East as a signatory.

Now, dictators have cares which do not afflict the rulers of democratic States, however much they gain by the single direction — affairs in their own countries and the suppressions and oppressions whereby they maintain themselves in power. The politicians of democracy may find their popularity and their power decline in temporary eclipse, but the machinery of

their political system allows them to drop the reins without suffering extinction. A crushing reverse may find them merely deprived, for a time, of office and with complete freedom to return again to power with the popular will. Not so the dictators of the totalitarian regimes. Once they lose their stranglehold there is no return, but only another revolution in which they and their policies are for ever submerged. A dictator, therefore, cannot afford a reverse; he cannot stand still, but must go on feeding his people with success on success without pause. He dare not rest on his laurels, as can the statesmen of the more elastic systems of democracy.

From the time of Pétain's surrender, there had been no fresh leaves in Hitler's crown; and Mussolini, his fleet in hiding or fleeing ingloriously before the might of the British Navy, his armies decisively beaten in Libya, had already shed some laurels. Not only for their own peoples must there be provided some new triumph, whether in the field or in diplomacy; for in international affairs, and in the forum of neutral opinion, only success finds new support. In June, America and the neutrals were convinced that Britain's defeat was near, and now the strength of the Navy and the Air Force, the power of resistance of her population and the vigour of her new leader changed that view, revived and drew closer the weakened bonds of friendship, and gave heart to those who needed only the encouragement of a British success to infuse into them confidence to defy the menace of the aggressors. The Axis Powers must produce some quick result or a new paper triumph to feed their propaganda machines.

Ribbentrop exhumed the corpse of the Anti-Comintern Pact, rehashed it, dressed it anew and served it up as the Berlin Agreement: an "epoch-making event" destined to create and perpetuate a new order in Europe and another in the East. Ciano stamped it with the impress of an "indissoluble union of spirit, power and outlook"; Kurusu, with Oriental magnificence, declared that "in the hands of the protagonists of justice in Japan, Germany and Italy, the pact would become the sword of the true fighter and thus contribute to the peace of the world." With unaccustomed modesty, Ribbentrop forbore to praise it, preferring to use the occasion to vent his windy threats.

It may have served with the Italians, the Germans and the inarticulate masses in the occupied countries where the truth cannot reach. But it hardened American opinion, left Turkey and Greece resolute, and exposed everywhere the nakedness of Axis realism. Madrid was obediently impressed, but what of

the oracle of the Kremlin? Does M. Stalin see in a new Japanese order in Eastern Asia signs of comfort for the Union Socialist Soviet Republics? Is he satisfied with Germany in Rumania, preparing to dominate Bulgaria, and would he be satisfied with Germany astride the Bosphorus, ready to reach out through Turkey and Syria to Mosul and Baku, or extending her protection to the Ukraine? He cannot regard with equanimity a new order in Europe under German hegemony.

What Germany would like to do and what she can do are poles asunder. Hitherto Stalin's acquiescence has been purchased with territories which in every case have strengthened Russia's strategic frontier against Germany. He is afraid of Germany. He was afraid of her when he concluded his non-aggression pacts with France and with Czechoslovakia. It was mainly through fear of her that when Poland was about to be attacked he was not willing to enter an alliance with Britain. He had no faith in pacts of non-aggression or in the value of one with the Western Powers after having seen Czechoslovakia sacrificed at Munich, where he was not invited to take part in the deliberations with the four Great Powers of Europe. And Ribbentrop offered him something tangible without the need to fight for it, while the Western Powers asked him to make war for Poland, a country which had cast expansionist eyes on Soviet territory. When Germany invaded Poland, the Soviets took their slice equally with Germany and got their strategic bases in the Baltic. The permit for Germany to enter Scandinavia brought its reward in Bessarabia—and always greater security for Russia against Germany.

Stalin is suspicious of democracy in Britain, which he regards as a bourgeois capitalist State. Though unaggressive, Britain, therefore, is an enemy equally with Germany. But he knows that Russia has more to fear from the aggressive enemy, Germany, than she has from the British Empire. He is likely to hunt in the company of the wolf so long as each expedition leaves his country in a still stronger position to resist Germany after each act of violence and spoliation has added to her offensive power.

There must come a time, however, when he finds the company no longer safe or profitable. The question arises whether, with the signature of the Three Power Pact and Germany's incursion into Rumania, Stalin still feels himself secure enough to go yet further as Germany's partner, or whether the time has not come to call a halt. Up to the time of writing, he has not shown his hand and he may maintain his enigmatic silence for some time yet. But the official Tass Agency stated that

Russia was not informed in advance of Germany's intention to occupy Rumania.

The parties to the pact have taken care to reassure Stalin that it is not aimed at Russia by inserting ■ it a declaration that its terms in no way affect the existing political status as between each of them and Soviet Russia. But that must be as Stalin takes it according as his credulity is strained. ■ was obviously intended as a veiled ultimatum to the United States ■ keep out of the war and to reduce her war shipments to Great Britain. It was also ■ a warning to the Soviets that if a military alliance with Turkey or Greece or Yugoslavia, or all three, were likely to follow the German threat to those States to which the advance in Rumania and the intimidation of Bulgaria clearly point, Soviet Russia must reckon with being at war with Japan in the event of her entering such an alliance.

The time seems ■ have come when Russia and Germany must forgo further risky adventures in common. No doubt Hitler and Ribbentrop reckon upon their ability to halt Russia with the threat of action by Japan if she gives armed support to Turkey. But Russia wants no war between Turkey and Germany. She does not want Germany in Asia or at the Dardanelles able to threaten Baku.

As Russia fears Germany, so also Germany fears the Soviets. If Russia shows her determination to prevent further German penetration in the Balkans, it is extremely unlikely that Hitler will make the attempt. It would seem more prudent, indeed, and a more probable course for him to take, to consolidate his gains in Rumania, make secure the much needed oil supply, and not risk having to engage in what he has consistently declared must at all costs be avoided: a war on two fronts. With Britain still standing firm and her power to take the offensive steadily growing greater; with Greece and Turkey in fulfilment of their treaty, resisting or ready to resist aggression; and with a possibly hostile Russia on her flank, Germany may well hesitate before plunging recklessly into new adventures which could only bring disaster.

Stalin has not disclosed his intentions. His Communism is realistic and aggressive, teaching that all other nations are the enemies of the Soviets. It is not the aggression of the Nazis that he condemns, but their Fascism; yet he does not trust Britain. The fact that Britain is fighting to restore the small nations which have been the victims of Germany's predatory acts makes no appeal ■ him because he is himself an aggressor and wants to hold what he has seized. His attitude, therefore, will be determined solely by what he considers to be in the interests of

his aggressive Communism and by the need to secure Russia against a settlement with Germany which is no more than postponed. The non-recognition by Britain of his conquests and the retention of Baltic balances in this country provide obstacles to any understanding between Britain and the Soviets, yet no one seriously believes that Britain, emerging victorious but exhausted from the present conflict, will be in a state to engage the Soviets in war to force them to disgorge. We allowed Japan to run amok in Manchukuo ; in the name of appeasement we recognized Mussolini's conquest of Abyssinia, watched him seize Albania and sacrificed Czechoslovakia for peace. Is not the cause for which the war is being waged as desirable of attainment ? We have a big task before us ■ we are to right all the wrongs in the world.

There are greater issues at stake for M. Stalin than those involved in such recognition, and it is greatly to be desired that he may not be blind to the dangers which lie ahead of his country ■ he continues to connive at the misdeeds of Hitler in the hope of more bribes from Ribbentrop. Soviet Russia would receive no consideration if Hitler were to realize his dream of Britain's downfall. There need not then be a long pause before everything Stalin has gained is taken from him and all Poland and the Ukraine are under the Nazi heel.

There is a danger that Stalin may think it safe to stay on his course a little longer, and that danger comes from the wiles of Ribbentrop. Unprincipled, desperate for any expedient to carry on the chain of Germany's successes, he has still the power and the prestige of achievement to render his threats doubly effective. But with the proven valour of our superb Air Force, the might of our invincible Navy, the vast resources of the Empire and the decisive help of America, we are able to give the wavering and the friendly nations encouragement to range themselves on our side before they, too, fall under the sway of the Axis imperialists.

Russia's attitude towards the Axis may be expected to undergo considerable modification as a result of the pact, and the change is likely to be from non-belligerency to watchful neutrality rather than intervention on either side. Germany's hopes were that she would put pressure on Turkey to lessen her hostility towards Axis plans in the Balkans. The pact, however, ■ in reality a revival of the old Anti-Comintern Pact—Ribbentrop's *chef-d'œuvre*—renewed and redressed by the original partners to it. ■ Stalin recognizes the old device in its new finery, then surely with the failure to acquaint him with Germany's intention to occupy Rumania rankling, he cannot

be misled as ■ its true import. There is, on the contrary, a reasonable probability that Russia will reach an agreement with her old friend Turkey, and such an agreement would effectively bar Germany's progress towards the Straits and the intimidation of the few remaining free nations in the Balkans.

The meeting of the dictators of the new order in Europe on the Brenner Pass followed in less than a week of the signing ■ the pact, after Ribbentrop had gone to Rome to prepare the ground for Hitler with Mussolini and Ciano. There, the course of the winter campaign was finally planned in the light of the failure of the assault on Britain. The seizure of the Rumanian oilfields—an outcome of the pact—was agreed upon and plans were laid for an Italian attack on Greece and a double threat to Yugoslavia. Sheltering under the menace of a Japanese declaration of war ■ Russia should join in, they contrived their schemes without troubling to communicate them to the Kremlin, confident that the pact would be a warning to Stalin to moderate his interest in Turkey and the Balkans.

It is too early to say that the pact has failed altogether. Admittedly, it has failed with America, where it has had the effect of swinging opinion decisively to the side of Britain. It has given a strong impetus to American efforts to speed up and enormously increase the help she is giving to Britain, and it has brought Japan and the Axis appreciably nearer to a conflict with the United States. Turkey and Greece are not cowed by it, their will to resist aggression openly declared. And Stalin, silent in the Kremlin and carrying out large-scale "manceuvres" with the Red Army, must, if he has eyes to see with, recognize the red light of danger.

It may prove in the end the greatest mistake that Ribbentrop has yet made.

Cynics have said hard things about diplomacy in the past, but it ■ worthy of note that the unkindest cuts ■ all have been reserved for the diplomats of Germany. The doings of von Ribbentrop appear likely to enrich the anthology.

He comes ready for any vile bargain, to gain a confederate by dividing with him what is stolen or is still to be stolen from the weak. Before these he appears armed with the threat of overwhelming force, despoiling them to bribe and corrupt the strong. His weapons are lies, treachery, fear and an opportunism that is wholly without sense of shame.

There is no reason to decry our own diplomacy or to cavil at the work ■ our ambassadors because, one after another, they returned from the tyrant-ridden countries of Europe with a

confession of failure to make. In America, Turkey and Greece they have been conspicuously successful, whilst even in Russia and Spain recently, Axis hopes have not been realized. Wherever they have been accredited, they have upheld the honour of Britain and the Empire, suffering defeat only by reason of the broken faith and the ignoble methods employed against them by Hitler and Ribbentrop—and their imitators in the cause ■ Nazi and Fascist imperialism. No structure built with materials so base as Ribbentrop has used can withstand a serious reverse, and the crazy edifice of the new order will not long endure.

There are great evils he will yet attempt; more victims for him to betray, more dupes to suborn. Only if his true measure has been taken will it be possible to guard against his practices of dishonour and deceit.

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